

Forge

by grayorca

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Summary: HIATUS. Whiterun wakes up to a dovah landing upon Dragonsreach's balcony, unannounced and per her own choice. What could she want? Spoilers. AU. Post Alduin questline. Dragon and Companion centric. Suggestions welcome. Rated for violence and language.

## 1. Hail

**\*\*Disclaimer:\*\*** Skyrim and all its canon content are the property of Bethesda Game Studios. No infringement is intended.

Reksadonviing is a character of my own devising.

**\*\*Notes:\*\*** Wrote this in one afternoon. Just a little drabble that may or may not evolve into a multi-chapter story. I'll bear out why in simple terms - I love Skyrim and its infinite plot possibilities. Among my favorite aspects about it are the dragons themselves.

I'll let you read the rest.

To any who know better than me: I am an Elder Scrolls noob. Take pity on the fact, right now, that I know little beyond what is covered in Skyrim. Any mistakes are my own.

**\*\*Author's Notes (Edit 2):\*\*** Another thing I should mention - though I know little about the franchise - but this story relies heavily on the reader already knowing which canon characters are who. So... spoiler alert?

**\*\*Author's Notes (Edit 3):\*\*** Fixed a plethora of capitalization errors and incorrect Dov terms between chapters one through thirteen.

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>"Forge"<strong>\_

\* \* \*

><p>Paarthurnax had been adamant at first. They were to leave Tamriel, no exceptions, leave behind the black mark Alduin had left on their kind's collective history. Jul - Man, Mer, and all variants in between - would not tolerate their presence. If there was any hope to make peace with the mortal races, it could only be achieved with the dragons putting as much collective distance behind them as possible.<p>

Wise as he was, their once-lord's brother was only one dragon, and he was only weeks new to the command popular vote had bequeathed him. He could scarcely stop the dissenters from remaining in Skyrim if they so chose.

Odahviing was one such case. As a matter of personal honor, he had pledged himself to the individual who had slain Alduin. The objections of nay-sayers throughout their number did nothing to dissuade him. He broke from the formation following a short, heated discussion with Paarthurnaax - the only dovah to depart in service to another besides his or her self.

Others followed, their destinations varied, but their reasons all their own. Holding to his judgment, Paarthurnax did not try to stop them. The only scorn he offered were the forlorn glances paid whenever one of their number, unexpected or not, veered away.

Their kind - once a proud, tyrannical force to be reckoned with - were now largely aimless. After all the fighting, all the bloodshed, to seek peace with themselves was not something most of them could readily swallow. The older ranks of their dwindling numbers saw this, as only a few equal or close to Odahviing's age returned to the skies of Skyrim, apparently content with whatever fate their behavior would one day land them in.

Reksadonviing did not stray at first. One of the last to be resurrected by the late World-Eater, of only a shy dozen females that were entombed, she was not so sure of her place. Barely old enough to breed, resigning herself to brooding for a lifetime to sate various suitors did not hold the same appeal it once had hundreds of years previous. The world was, in many ways, the same as the one she remembered, but it was different enough to make her think hatchlings had no set place in it.

Put simply, she wanted to know. How was it different? Why were these people better left alone? Her own experiences with the mortals were few, as Alduin had ordered his harem to remain hidden, their needs seen to by a host of undead draugr and lesser-ranking drakes. Was there absolutely no middle ground to be reached with the Jul?

If shyness ever existed in their kind, she personified the loathsome trait to a tee. Adorned with fewer dorsal spikes than a typical fo dovah, her stature no where near as grand as that of a drake's. The small, gray-scaled female was hesitant to part company with her elders. Their guidance was tolerable if not their scrutiny. She flew with them for days without uttering a word, hunted alongside them dutifully, listened to them reminiscence about the past and fret about the future.

It did not go unnoticed by Paarthurnax. He recognized her silent deliberations and tense, distant stares for what they were. While they spoke on no more than on a handful of occasions, he always seemed able to read into the thoughts her lips dared not utter. Never was it discussed in detail what she wanted, for he already had to have sensed some idea. Finally, on one star-studded night while the flock roosted along an isolated island mountain range, he offered as much of a blessing as she supposed his old bones could muster:

"\_Bo tirahk\_."

Fly safe.

Without a backwards glance, Reksadonviing took wing, following the constellations back the way they had flown. The distance of the return flight did not daunt her. The restlessness taking root in her soul spurred her on, willing her to try and find something better.

There had to be something more left for them in Skyrim. Never mind that the prophecy of the Dovahkiin had come to fruition. Any creature of higher calling had something to motivate their actions, and dovahhe - for all their shortcomings - were among the highest called. After much deliberation, she had decided this was hers.

The return was not without its difficulties. The lingerers of Keizaal were of stubborn mettle, jealously guarding their hunting territories as if they had never laid eyes on her in the weeks before. Already the more remote forests and cliffs were laid claim to by fire-breathing drakes, and in the first few days she found herself in the ironic situation of fleeing from former allies-in-arms, with little more than regrets and self-pity to fill her stomach.

Only one took exception to her: Odahviing. Like Paarthurnax, he did not pry into her affairs, but tolerated her otherwise-strange impulses. Their familiarity had already been established in the valley she and her creche-sisters had been sequestered in. Being a drake, he appreciated her presence simply on the basis of ego, and she appreciated the easy meals. They hunted and roosted together for a few short days before the call of the Dovahkiin wrenched Odahviing away. In his absence, a challenger encroached on the red dovah's hunting range, driving Reksadonviing away in a flurry of bites and fire.

She had not tried to reunite with Odahviing since, nor heard his voice on the wind trying to rejoin hers.

Sparsely populated as Skyrim was, there were regions avoided by the Dov. These places, where there were hard-won prey to be found and unforgiving elements that made flight as difficult for her, it made life on the ground struggle to get by. It was those locations that held the most appeal to her. On the days in which hunting proved fruitful and the weather favorable, Reksadonviing flew from one snow-covered hold to the next, well out of reach of the highest-flying arrows. She circled, watched and waited, learning what she could from afar.

Each city seemed so different from the next. The scattered villages, anthills in comparison to their larger colonies, all buzzed with the

same mundane rhythm that was everyday life. The only common attribute between them all appeared to be the stir of hostile activity the gray dovah's presence brought about.

Her simple and immediate goal, communication, appeared almost impossible to achieve. Landing among the jooree in such states was out of the question. She would have to find just the right opportunity.

With the polar settlements discounted, she moved south. The lush central grassplains of the province looked like a prime spot to her, with plenty of space to land and take off. Save for a scattering of farmhouses patrolled by Whiterun guards, the only hunting hazard she could foresee would be the receiving end of an errant giant's club, should she edge too close to a mammoth.

But therein also laid the problem of distance: on a clear day she would be visible for miles around. Any passing folk were bound to run the other way once they caught a glimpse of her pallid gray hide. And there was nothing genteel to the sight of a dovah trying to petition a running audience into a stop, assuring they meant no harm.

Not that she would blame them. A dovah who did not crave to enslave or decimate mortals - it was virtually unheard of.

Eventually, resignation won out over caution. Dismayed, as she grew leaner and leaner, Reksadonviing thought less of her goal and more of her immediate needs. With desperation she latched onto the first insane idea that, in her deteriorated condition, seemed even vaguely sane.

Dragonsreach. The great balcony on which Numinex - and later Odahviing - had been imprisoned.

That was it. She would do as he did for the Dovahkiin: she would make an offering of herself.

Pride wasn't exactly a crucial deciding factor. The only thing at stake would be her own life, and if other dovahhe thought it their calling to one day defend their kind's honor by weeding her from their ranks, she would deal with that when and if it happened.

Understandably, when the residents of the keep had awoken to shouts of "dragon" by the overnight watch, Reksadonviing thought twice of her plan, and almost bolted. Nervousness hindered her approach, and she practically crashed into landing upon the stony balcony. Fighting every instinct not to lash out with claw and fire, she thrust her head under the protective crux of both wingthumbs - the most inane sight any human might expect - and froze, huddled, stifling growls at the initial volleys of arrows and firebolts ricocheting off her body.

Eventually, the pricks of pain lessened, and the host of armed swordsmen assaulting her drew back. Their war-cries devolved into stuttering exclamations of confusion, as one by one they realized their attacker's lack of retaliation. Slowly, she peeked out from behind her tattered folds of ash-gray wing, bleeding from a dozen superficial wounds, green eyes wide and beseeching. It took all the composure she possessed to steady her voice for a simple, if equally

guttural and meek greeting of "hail Whiterun".

The news spread like wildfire over a water-starved wheatfield. A dovah had graced Dragonsreach of its own accord, with apparently-non-hostile intentions. Within the hour, as early sunlight flooded the landing, a crowd filled the balcony's fringes on three sides. Townsfolk of assorted classes pointed and chattered among themselves, and the few children in attendance, already smitten with the newcomer who must have seemed like a storybook character come to life, strained against their elders' protective hands.

Said dovah huddled against the floor, silent, unable to help the occasional uneasy glance up at the wooden trap poised over her head. Surrounded by walls and people, she felt trapped enough. With some convincing, she had let herself be ushered forward, into position underneath the would-be restraint. To assure her 'hosts' this was no trick, she had agreed to place herself in the most vulnerable, claustrophobic position imaginable, short of being muzzled or blinded by magic.

The city's jarl and his esteemed colleagues finally took center stage, flanked to either side by no less than a dozen guards, to address their unexpected visitor.

And thus Reksadonviing's opportunity to address the Jul, however trivially, arrived.

Formalities aside, Jarl Balgruuf the Greater summed up the situation with as much bluntness as one could expect:

"Well. This is quite the unexpected reception I did not see myself giving upon lying down to rest last evening."

Black claws planted firmly beneath her, wings curled securely to her sides, Reksadonviing held her head low, jaw parallel with the floor as she spoke. She kept her eyes down as though it were an address of Alduin himself. "Had I the means to send word ahead I would have done so and not caused such a stir, milord. \_Krosis.\_ My apologies."

Halting and unnatural as her Tamrielic dialect was, by the murmur of astonishment she heard rippling through the onlookers around, it sounded like her subservient tone had had the desired effect.

"Apologies notwithstanding, you ought to have known better."

She paused in replying, mindful to keep her speech perfectly plain and understandable. "Aye, I'm aware of your recent... capture of Odahviing, as are the rest of my kind. But as I come to throw myself at your mercy, despite the inadvertent grandness of the occasion, it is not a large favor I wish to ask."

"What favor could a dragon possibly want of Whiterun?"

Reksadonviing blinked, glancing up at the housecarl's incredulous utterance, intent on silencing him with a glare, to no avail. The jarl's sideways glance and raised hand mutely signaled his deference to ask the same.

Swallowing what felt like a mace lodged in her throat, the grounded dovah voiced her answer: "Merely the pleasure of your city's company, milord."

"Preposterous!"

Proventus Avenicci's cry was taken up a hundredfold as voices and fists alike were raised all around in outrage. Reksadonviing flinched despite herself, closing her eyes and wishing at that moment she could do the same for her ears. The noise grated on her confidence more than her inborn hatred of mortal kind.

"Nonsense! What kind of request is that?"

"Slay the beast and be done with it!"

"Not in a thousand years!"

"Order, order!" Balgruuf's stout commands eventually made their way over the ensuing din as his guards fanned out among the crowds, swiftly returning the palace's balcony to a state of tense near-silence. To Reksadonviing's surprise, he turned his back on her, waving to direct his subjects' collective attention. "Now, I trust that was the biggest surprise our guest had in store, and we will suffer no further interruptions. One more outburst, you will all be removed from the premises and these deliberations made confidential, understood?"

The gray dovah attempted to steel her nerves, holding a breath as the jarl turned to face her, hands placed to his hips. His expression remained grim. "You can gather for yourself why that may be a favor I cannot honor, dragon."

She tilted her head down, unable to help feeling the disappointment she knew had always been a possibility. "Yes."

"However, your motivations escape me. Was it not your kind's ultimatum to leave Tamriel for good?"

Word of the exodus had travelled fast.

"For those loyal to Paarthurnax and his ideals, yes, milord. But as with any race, there are those who believed differently, and sought their own fates. This is the one I have chosen for myself. Were it so easy, I would have fostered an agreement with another jarl of some lesser standing long before this."

If Balgruuf was in any way flattered by the praise, he did not show it. His tone remained polite, if suspect: "Then why chose Whiterun to approach?"

"Latent events. Odahviing still heeds the call of the Dovahkiin. And your city was instrumental in forging that alliance. Intrigued, I seek no glory other than to know your kind better for myself."

"For yourself, and not dragonkind?"

Reksadonviing inclined her head in acknowledgement. "We both know how stubborn and unreasonable my kind can sometimes be. I have no ties to them besides kinship of build. Should you grant this privilege, you

will have no trouble from me."

The housecarl piped up: "Hmph. What guarantees do we have you won't double-cross us? Those who know loyalty only to themselves are often of the most dangerous ilk."

At this the dovah glanced down to wait on the jarl's approving nod before addressing the dark elf. "If I may be so blunt, to what end would treason serve me, milady, when I've already decided to part from my kind?"

"For what reason?" Standing with arms crossed, Avenicci's pinched expression remained the definition of unconvinced. "You seem relatively unscarred to bear any sort of grudge that would compel you to desert them."

Reksadonviing clicked her jaws together, contemplative. She had wondered the same thing for many nights on wind-swept bluffs. Replaying old memories had dulled her to the pain that was her early life. The crowd of townspeople and guards ceased to be important as she lost herself in telling the abridged edition of her life story.

"I was not long for the world in, what you dub, the Second Era. My clutch-sisters and I were hatched after Alduin's banishment. It was a time in which little to no allegiance existed among the Dov. Besides the instinctual love a mother will have for her young, we were not so loyal among ourselves as to ourselves. That mindset has survived to this day. All of us swore ourselves to Alduin for returning us to this plane of existence. With him gone, some pledged themselves to Paarthurnax, while others went their own way, for - like it or not - that has always been our way."

A growl surfaced in Irileth's voice. "And the enslavement your lot perpetrated upon Man and Merkind? Are we just supposed to forget that ever happened?"

Reksadonviing thumped her spade-shaped tail against the stones behind her, claws curling to match the tight edge of her words. "There are no words I can speak that will erase that it ever happened, fahliil. All that I can do is look to the future, and hope taking a different path turns out to be the right one. In a sense, I come here asking for help that my kind's old ways not lead me astray."

"Blazing a trail, as it were, so that others might follow?" Balgruuf spoke under his breath, but the scaled petitioner quirked her head, birdlike, at the drawn comparison. "You're not so unlike Paarthurnax as you'd like to see yourself, dragon."

"My name is Reksadonviing."

"That so?" One of the man's blond eyebrows hiked up, a glint of amusement surfacing in his eyes - the gleeful look of a fighter whom had accepted a challenge, if only for the fun of the struggle, if not the victorious outcome. "Then... Rekse, how may Whiterun assist you?"

**\*\*Author's Notes:\*\*** As I said, it's a drabble. At this point, I don't have a long-term plot in mind for Rekse. I kept her descriptors

pretty vague for that very reason (I picture her as a less-spiky Frost Dragon, basically). But her full name, even if doesn't roll off the tongue, does translate to "She Gray Wing" in Dragon Language.

It began with the idea of Numinex, and what his captive life in Dragonsreach might have been like. I like the idea of a dragon, post-Dragon Crisis, proving themselves, little by little, to be a worthy ally to the people of a given region (in this case, Whiterun Hold). If that's not revolutionary compared to how boastful and destructive they have acted in the past, I don't know what is.

Other inspirations include \_Dragonheart\_, \_How To Train Your Dragon\_, and the book series \_Temeraire\_ and \_Age of Fire\_.

Thanks for reading. I'm open to suggestions.

**\*\*Author's Notes (Edit 1):\*\*** Made a few tweaks, added a forgotten word here and there.

## 2. Vote

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Reksadonviing is a character of my own devising.

**\*\*Notes:\*\*** I admit, the plot is still largely aimless. As of yet the cast of canon characters I plan to include are Whiterun-specific. A few nondescript ones will probably be featured in larger roles than what was made of them in the game. But what few spoilers there are regarding that, I'll keep to myself for now.

My thanks to LadyDragon1316 for the feedback, and all the anonymous clicks this story has received thus far.

Read on.

\* \* \*

><p>"Feh. A revolting display."<p>

"Utterly ridiculous."

Avenicci and Irileth. Even from afar, the scorn was clear in their voices.

Reksadonviing allowed herself a growl, loud and drawn-out, caught up in the heat of battle as she was, and bit down. The dagger-wielding bandit trapped between her jaws finally gave up his desperate struggle. She felt as much as heard the deep \_crunch\_ of his breaking spine reverberate in her skull, and tasted the blood coating her tongue. With a great heave, she tossed him aside.

The nameless corpse joined the wide ring of dispatched foes surrounding the besieged alcove. With only steel and a handful of weak spells to show as defense, they had fallen quickly. The newly-minted group of thieves had become disbanded no more than a week after setting up camp beneath the overhang that sat to the west of the Whiterun bluff.



Delicately, the gray dovah tried to grasp the dagger stuck, hilt-deep, between the scales of her nose. More growls of frustration arose as her thumbclaw repeatedly slipped and missed, as she tried to wedge its talon in close enough to remove the new nuisance. Finally, with a thump of her tail and a roar that was part aggravation, part victorious, she took to the air.

Clear the smugglers out of the den. Those had been her instructions.

Keep them out. That was her long-term goal.

In circling, she spied her audience - a mixed crowd of Dragonsreach guards, arranged in a protective curl around her judges. Balgruuf and his counsel were easy to pick out, seated upon horses so as to be afforded an acceptable view while still maintaining a safe distance. Reksadonviing didn't miss nor mind the nervous flutter the horses gave as she descended in a spiral, alighting on the grassy knoll before them.

"You did well, Reksha."

She dipped her head in acknowledgment, the closest parallel to a bow she could think to make. Already the jarl seemed to have taken a fondness to addressing her via that imposed nickname. While it grated in all the ways the Dov considered it, to her it felt like a welcome bit of progress had been made. Balgruuf, the highest ranking individual of his immediate hold, had given her a favorable vote.

Strongly opinionated as they were, Avenicci and Irileth would have to bow to his word.

Respect for a chain of command: at least that aspect of their society was not so dissimilar from the dovahhe.

"As well as such a menial battle could be fought."

"We all must start somewhere, Irileth."

Huffing an unimpressed breath between her teeth, Reksadonviing ignored the elf's attempt to deflate her moment of confidence. She wrinkled her nose, as much as her limited facial muscles allowed underneath the blood-stained scales. The sting of the dagger wedged behind her left nostril, driven into the tight space at the base of her recurved nose spur, was already proving more of a nuisance.

Avenicci immediately misinterpreted the resulting sneer. "It would seem she's not inclined to agree with you, my lord."

"On the contrary, mindir... counsel, I have every reason to agree with him," Reksadonviing snapped, uncaring of the deep rumble beneath her words. "Are you so eager to think me an idiot for subjecting myself to the whims of those my kind typically think inferior?"

"No one is saying that, Reksha. But you must understand that earning our collective trust won't happen overnight. Too much has transpired."

"\_Geh, zoh.\_" The wayward dovah wiped at her muzzle, feigning a vain interest in how the red blood discolored her gray countenance. "What must I do next?"

"For now, see to your end of our bargain. The alcove is yours, as promised, to tend and defend. Once word of this exploit spreads we should have little to worry for any more petty crime to be planned in this location."

"And the bodies?"

"Following a brief inspection, we'll determine whether any of them were of outstanding renown." Balgruuf waved a contingent of his guards forward. "After that, you may do with them what you will."

Reksadonviing glanced after the expressionless helmets that looked her way, turning as if their owners felt anxiety for skirting so close, but said nothing. She turned away in kind, ignoring the sticky taste of blood on her tongue for the moment. While the bandits weren't exactly to her personal taste, in this case, she supposed she could not afford to be picky.

The guards were quick in their work. The six bandits were found to be of Nord origin, but beyond that, little else seemed to be taken note of. Reksadonviing dipped and washed her face in a nearby pond, mudcrabs skittering away at her approach, and looked up in time to see the jarl's escort disappear without much more ceremony. She muttered a "farewell" to herself before slinking back under the rocky outcrop.

An assortment of goods blocked her way: wooden tables, crates, shelves, and cabinets tucked up against the cool, shadowy wall. Weather-worn, it didn't seem like they appeared to hold any value to her hosts, and answered her unspoken question of why it was all left behind. Reksadonviing reduced them to splinters with a few swings of the horns at the back of her skull, sweeping them out in a broken pile with her wings and tail.

The sun, high in the sky at midday, stole the humidity emitted by the few surrounding swamps. Clawing up the dirt beneath the stone, she excavated a larger hollow beneath the rock. Dust gave way to clumps of grassy dirt, sticking between her scales and between her wing folds. She dug, assessed her work, and continued to dig until the white spines along her back no longer scraped the stone above.

Finally, with her alcove now turned into a decent-sized hollow below the surrounding ground, she climbed back up into the sunlight to attend to the fly-ridden corpses of her once-foes. She separated them from their armored garb with her teeth, devouring them only with the fervor of one who had not eaten a decent meal in so long. With the jarl's blessing, assuring her they were of no importance to his city, it made the work of eating a welcome task.

Chores done, she washed again in the pond, and curled up to rest in her new dwelling. The air there was cool and dank against her scales, a welcome relief from the sun's hot, oppressive gaze. Hidden from view to any rogue fliers, she finally felt the vague measure of

security she had no experienced since leaving Paarthurnax's ranks. Her loud breathing echoed two-fold in this space, assuring her it was only she who commanded this new cave.

Still, she relaxed with green eyes open, watching the churned lip of ground for any interlopers that might happen upon her. Be it intentionally or by accident did not matter.

Balgruuf had been very clear about that: it would take time before bandits throughout the hold understood the message Reksadonviing was tasked with sending. So she could expect more unwilling foes to turn up on her new himdah - home - in the days to come.

Perhaps she would find some way to remove the infernal dagger from her nose while she waited.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Notes:<strong> Rating's bound to go up due to the more graphic mentions of violence here. Yippie.

Want more? Let me know. This was another short, quickly-written installment, meant to as setup more than plot. I'm open to any ideas my readers would like to see made literary reality.

One such thing I'm wondering: shall this story continue to be dovah-centric, with an open call for OCs, or shall we continue to stick with the OC-meets-canon formula?

### 3. Weak

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Reksadonviing and any unrecognizable names are characters of my own devising.

**\*\*Notes:\*\*** Shoutout time. :D

The input is much appreciated, "Random Guest". OC-meets-canon is what I err toward, too, but as an aforementioned Elder Scrolls noob, I'm open for any suggestions more seasoned fans might want to offer. The more elaborately explained, the better.

Thanks also to Br2nd66 and ShadowedFang for adding "Forge" to their story alerts.

Flashback chapter, so that we might shed a little light on why Reksha is considered such a pansy among her kind, and does not exactly fit into a world of dovah-eat-dovah.

\* \* \*

><p><em>"<em>Sahlo\_."\_

\_Wings furled and head bowed, the grayscaled female openly flinched under Alduin's burning red gaze, but she did not retort. Odahviing, perched upon a nearby battlement, repeated the softly-uttered word in a roar. The cry of several dovahhe' voices rang out along the

snow-strewn, fog-covered valley's reach, echoing their lord's single-word assessment.\_

\_Weak. The black-winged dovah had spied, identified, and sized her up in no less than a moment's thought. As with all his resurrected comrades, he took the time to assess and address each one, including the crop of females that had been uninterred from Skyrim's westernmost reaches. This included the meek halfbreed whom clearly appeared to be the proverbial runt of the clutch.\_

\_"I know your sham of a story, \_punah\_. You need not offend my ears in telling your own abridged version."\_

\_She managed to stifle the nervous quiver of the black spines folded at her jowls. "\_Geh, dii drog.\_"\_"

\_"Now enlighten me: how will you be planning to earn your place among my ranks, once the conquest of Keizaal is assured?"\_"

\_"Through unerring and devout service, my lord."\_"

\_Alduin's gnarled, ebony visage filled her field of vision - the oppressive closeness usually reserved only for established mates. "Whatever said service may entail?" he rumbled.\_

\_Standing nose-to-nose with the World-Eater, there was only one answer she could give: "\_Nol nu erei dii oblaan.\_"\_"

\_With as little warning, the larger dovah shoved her back, plunging them both off the cliff's edge. His victim couldn't help a startled cry as she twisted, unfurling her wings with a twisting wrench to keep herself from plummeting to her death on the rocks below. Flapping desperately, she steadied herself and rose, Alduin following at her heels.\_

\_"\_Ruz bo, sadon viing. Bo fah pah Hi los bahl!\_"\_"

\_Cowed, the younger dovah did as she was told, and flew that day for all she was worth. The ritual was typical, she knew, but that knowledge made it no more easy to stomach. Alduin was methodical, testing in varied ways all those who worked in his service. In her case, that meant serving as a scapegoat for latent frustrations. For hours the black dovah chased after her, shouting and clawing, pushing her to the limits of her endurance before finally departing with a long howl of distain.\_

\_The other dovahhe merely watched as the sport played out. Only when the shaken gray female barely managed a stumbling return to her original roost did any of them dare speak.\_

\_"Surprising you weathered that much, youngling."\_"

\_Nearby lay Keinlassrahgots, the largest and proven-strongest of the females yet brought back to Keizaal. She lounged on the ornate stone overhang Alduin had 'gifted' her. Her roost was a few body lengths away from the grayscaled's, but even at a distance her scornful glare felt too hot for comfort.\_

\_Trembling, Reksadonviing - begrudgingly dubbed "She of Gray Wing" by their absent lord - slinked into the nearest hiding place she could

find. She curled up at the foot of the stone wall, behind a scraggly stand of pine trees whose roots had managed to filter down through the cliff's stone. Her muscles ached. Half a dozen furrows rended the scales along her shoulders and back. Thick dollops of blood fell and stained the ground beneath her, glints of starlight visible across their surfaces.\_

\_The tell-tale flap, flap, flap of leathery wings followed in the ensuing silence. Though she dreaded what she would see, Reksadonviing forced her eyes open, recognizing the less pungent scent of Odahviing as he landed before her.\_

\_She drew back as he leaned in between the trees for a closer look. Any thought to shout or shriek in defiance died in her throat. "Don't fret, youngling. I mean you no harm."\_

\_She coughed, throat dry from her day-long excursion. "You must not know my story then, milord, and that Alduin's treatment is justified."\_

\_The red dovah tilted his head. His eyes, gentle and curious, betrayed the nonchalant-seeming quirk. "Pray tell, for I do not."\_

\_Ever the eavesdropper, and instigator, Keinlassrahgots alighted nearby, blue wings mantling in her irritation. "You need not know nor waste your time with her, Odahviing. Our lord has told all that must be said - she is a weakling, fit for service only as a menial distraction, fodder for the arrows, should she ever see the field of battle. You dare question his judgement?"\_

\_Their second-in-command whirled around, suddenly the picture of aggression. "I dare question those who think twice of my loyalty to Alduin!" he roared.\_

\_Reksadonviing paid the now-quarreling pair only an unimpressed blink. Painfully, she pushed herself up on aching wings, turning around to lick the wounds between her spines. Eventually, their argument grew distant, and she was left blessedly alone.\_

\_Such was the way of their kind. Halfbreeds like her were traditionally treated as inferior, thought unable to hold their own in matters of politics, unworthy of presiding over the toils of enslaved Jul. No one worshipped them. Their mixed bloodlines weren't considered important, even if Reksadonviing's sire had once been a drake of high esteem. His name was no longer spoken with reverence. Why should hers be any different?\_

\_The weeks to come brought more of the same behavior. Keinlassrahgots earned Alduin's favor as worthy to lead what minor number of females had been reanimated thus far, the Rekindled Creche as they were later named. She thirsted for the same authority he wielded so tantalizingly in front of her. More than once Reksadonviing spied them flying from the valley side-by-side.\_

\_Little food was bequethed to her by the draugr. Her wounds healed slowly. She spent many days grounded, not daring to brave the air for fear of being set upon by her fellow females - the creche, as the drakes began referring to them as. Even bristling with spikes and a coat of stone-colored scales, being the smallest, she was an easy

target. Any infighting seemed curbed by her presence, as if she were conventionally provided to be bitten, clawed, or singed at a moment's notice.\_

\_She contented what moments of aggression found her in hunting the valley's lesser game, once she regained enough strength for flight. The native deer and the few packs of wolves that roamed the woods below were all but eliminated by the lithe dragoness. Thu'ums were not her strong suit. Ambush was her chosen tactic. She developed a peregrinian technique of dropping through the treetops like a rock, legs first, crushing her target with clawed toes before rending it apart with her teeth.\_

\_Her ingenuity caught Odahviing's attention.\_

\_His manner was the exact opposite of Alduin's. Thoughtful and unassuming, his brutish look was offset by his comparative charms. Reksadonviing knew not what the circumstances were that he was made second, and he did not offer such a story for her ears. All he seemed intrigued by was her. Halfbreeds held a certain exoticity, or so he claimed.\_

\_Their meetings were few, for discretion's sake, but little by little, Reksadonviing began to confide in him. His company, however fleeting, was a welcome oasis of refuge in her miserable state of existence.\_

\_Only when he answered a new call on the wind and failed to return did she balk, and begin to rail against her self-imposed chains. She flew the valley's perimeter for hours longer than her allotted patrol demanded. Alduin howled and raged at her for venturing beyond the creche's reaches. These spats only intensified after learning of Odahviing's capture in Whiterun, his stay in captivity turning from days to weeks, and the brewing discontent among the Dov reached its zenith.\_

\_Having found her reason to speak, Reksadonviing roared back, demanding that her lord devise a plan to rescue his second-in-command.\_

\_He refused. So she took to trying to escape from the valley.\_

\_More than once, she failed - crashing in a mess of broken skin and scalded pride.\_

\_Keinlassrahgot proved not as dense as her thuglike manner first made her out to be. She bore witness to many of the confrontations between Alduin and Reksadonviing. Gradually, the grayscaled female's resolve favorably worked its way into the blue-skinned's logic. As another lost argument ended with Reksadonviing's banishment to the valley floor, her once-rival followed. The snow fell heavy that night. The larger, purebred fo dovah shielded her creche-sister to no consequence of the elements or to face their increasingly-irate leader's fury.\_

\_In no position to resist, Reksadonviing welcomed the taboo show of compassion.\_

\_She woke alone the next morning, ice-encrusted but feeling warmer than she had in months knowing she had another to thank for their

unspoken vote of approval.\_

\_Alduin had other things on his mind. The return of the Dovahkiin, whose deeds were becoming more noticable by the day, seemed to garner more and more of this attention. Petty matters such as disciplining the increasingly-rebellious Reksadonviing fell by the wayside, so much so that he did not even delegate said tasks to his subordinates.\_

\_Finally, something gave. Keinlassrahgots, lounging upon her altar, perked up at the first audible hint. Reksadonviing, roosting upon the ledge below, stood up upon all fours, turned her ears to the breeze, and also heard it. There were two voices on the wind: one she did not recognize, and one that was familiar enough to make her heart ache.\_

\_Paarthurnax. And Odahviing.\_

\_Paarthurnax's voice carried the dreaded message: Alduin had fled to Skuldafn. With Odahviing's aid, the Dovahkiin had followed. A final confrontation, long anticipated, was inevitable.\_

\_Still bound to his role as their lord's effective second, Odahviing's voice carried an order to any remaining Dov who would hear it: to meet at the summit of the Monahven. There they would await the battle's outcome.\_

\_The creche and what remained of their drake overlords took off unanimously.\_

\_Other dovahhe, mostly drakes, already roaming the skies of Keizaal, joined their flock. Reksadonviing flew no more than a wingspan away from Keinlassrahgots, regarding them with jealous green eyes. Struggles with the Jul aside, how exhilarating it must have been for them to fly without respect for borders. They gazed back at her, and those few who spoke to her did so in varying degrees of respect and disgust. Only the proximity of her higher-ranking friend kept the bullies among them away. She saw no other halfbreeds.\_

\_Much like the terrestrial path that led to High Hrothgar, the winds around the 7,000 Steps spiraled upward, running strong enough to glide on. The hundreds of wingbeats Reksadonviing heard in their communal flight decreased so she could only hear the occasional flap needed to stay aloft, or growl of frustration against the snow flurries that blinded them in their ascent.\_

\_At the peak, Paarthurnax and Odahviing waited. Perching upon a craggy outcrop, the skies around still full of dovahhe who chose to circle, Reksadonviing kept a wise distance. Her fellows were restless, she could hear it. To some, Paarthurnax - seated upon the Word-Wall as if it were a throne - was still a figure representative only of treachery, one who forsaked his calling in favor of a path less destructive. As the anxious fast commenced, she saw more than one drake bow to Odahviing, only to snarl at Alduin's kin.\_

\_Odahviing stood for none of it. A few short-lived quarrels broke out upon the mountaintop, quashing any urge Reksadonviing felt to approach him. Each challenging drake found themselves bested and tossed to the ground, with the red dovah poised over them, demanding

they show Paarthurnax all the due reverence they once showed Alduin.\_

\_Here the topic of Alduin's dubious claim to lordship, long festering, came out, as several heated debates erupted between various-minded dovahhe. Odahviing took center stage as a kind of mediator, alternatively commanding silence and speech to ensure each who wished it had a chance to speak.\_

\_Paarthurnax was a humble host. He seemed genuinely unbothered by the squabbling of his kind, a calm impassive rock amidst kicked-up seas. Those who addressed him formally and without ire were treated with as much civility as they afforded him. Nor did he hold a buffer of space about himself. While the hours ticked by, he flew and walked about the summit, conversing with any who desired it.\_

\_Reksadonviing kept to herself, thinking of the elder dovah and what had driven him here so many centuries ago. Hidden in the clouds, the Throat of the World was the perfect place to hide. The monastery below was but a few wingbeats away. Were the Jul who called themselves the Greybeards that much better than the company of his own kind?\_

\_Airborne, taking her due turn for flight while a tired drake borrowed her perch, she lost herself in such thoughts. Icicles forming along her spines and claws went unnoticed.\_

\_From above, a playful blast of fire jolted her from her musings, lighting the snowdrifts around a bright orange. The gray dovah yelped and spun upright to face the new threat.\_

\_Odahviing's assault from therein consisted only of deep laughter.\_

\_They flew together, reveling in their reunion, dancing while they could in their moment of freedom, unabashed. The poor weather would conceal their antics.\_

\_But not their words. Pleasantries aside, Odahviing was quick to show her to a semi-private outcrop, protected from above by a rim of broken stalactites. There they huddled side-by-side, nose-to-nose, and talked for what felt like hours. The surrounding cold was staved off by the intensity of their discussion.\_

\_Reksadonviing surprised herself. This was more talkative than she could ever remember being since or before the rekindling. She told all there was to tell about the impartial treatment of the creche, how Alduin refused her pleas to rescue his second, pointed out the scars of the wounds she had suffered. Only in hindsight did she realize the potential mistake pouring her literal soul out might have been. By then, though, there was no taking her disclosures back.\_

\_Odahviing scarcely blinked while he listened. The slight, puffy clouds of snowflakes stirred by his every breath seemed to be the only indication he hadn't been frozen in disbelief. Eventually, Reksadonviing talked herself into an awkward silence, eagerly awaiting his response.\_

\_"Why didn't you simply leave?"\_



\_Surprise floored her. Reksadonviing lifted her head sharply, jowl quills extended, eyes wide. She floundered and failed to find a retort.\_

\_Odahviing, apparently rethinking the bluntness of his hard-won question and sensing her distress, nuzzled her again. "Please, don't mistake my tone, \_zok shir\_. I mean nothing ill by it. Just -"  
\_

\_"Do you think I did not \_try\_?" Reksadonviing managed to choke out, then growled in annoyance at how shrill her voice became. She rose to her feet, unwinding herself from him, indignant. "Even had I succeeded, where could we have gone? I pled night and day. Alduin would not -"\_

\_"You could have fled and never looked back, found somewhere to hide. I would have found my way back to you eventually."\_

\_She drew back from his touch, lips curling up over ivory teeth, glaring at the red dovah through narrowed eyelids. "Easy for you to say. This struggle with the mortals has gone on for eons. How long have you had the pleasure of such luxurious thinking?"\_

\_Odahviing frowned. "That is beside the point. As is my earlier query, I've realized. Nevermind what has happened in the past. Alduin will fall soon enough, and we will be free to decide for ourselves what comes next."\_

\_Rekasonviing sneered. "You mean, after Paarthurnax takes Alduin's place?"\_

\_"He will, but not in the fashion our kind is used to. He preaches tolerance, inner peace, conquest through commonality."\_

\_"How - by lowering ourselves to the same level of squabbling disarray the various factions of mortals have achieved?"\_

\_"Arrogance does not suit you, \_dii lokal\_." Odahviing pressed his nose to hers again. She tried to growl, back away, met his steady, unwavering eyes, and failed. She had missed his counsel more than she could admit. "My pledges aside, change is in the wind for our kind. Paarthurnax will be heard, and I know his way will leave future generations better for it. I tell you this out of whatever goodness still exists in us Dov: hold onto that crass attitude and there will soon be no place left for you in Tamriel. Prove Alduin wrong - show all who would know you that kindness is no weakness."\_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Notes:<strong> I'll confess - I'm normally against OC/canon pairings. But given the nature of Skyrim's make-your-own-protagonist ways, I am willing to make an exception. It may not prove to be the lynchpin of the plot, but I thought that pairing Rekse with Odahviing, at least in a past tense, would give her some more texture (as my portrayal of her up until this point has felt pretty generic).

I can always amend the first chapter as needed to infer a little more

connection between them. They went their separate ways as circumstances dictated: Odahviing's promise to the Dovahkiin, versus Reksadonviing's promise to herself.

Thanks to for their translation engine. Now to clarify a few untranslated terms/phrases:

\_dii lokal \_- my love  
><em>fo dovah <em>- frost dragon  
><em>geh, dii drog <em>- yes, my lord  
><em>Keinlassrahgot<em> - "War Lively Aggression"  
><em>nol nu erei dii oblaan <em>- now until my end  
><em>punah<em> - female  
><em>zok shir<em> - most dear / dearest

#### 4. Smith

**\*\*Disclaimer:\*\*** Skyrim and all its canon content are the property of Bethesda Game Studios. No infringement is intended.

Reksadonviing and any unrecognizable names are characters of my own devising.

**\*\*Notes:\*\*** Thanks to MegaHog14, hades627, and Rip 27 for adding the story to their favs/alerts, and again to LadyDragon1316 for the feedback.

\* \* \*

><p>Her first night and following morning in the hollow proved uneventful. Reksadonviing woke before the sun rose, scales glimmering with beads of cold dew. Memories melted into the present like Monahven's snowflakes. The ground beneath her curled form was warm, so there she remained, watching the sky outside grow steadily brighter and brighter. Only when the stiffness in her back grew unbearable did she pull herself up and out onto open ground.<p>

Whiterun, to her east, appeared quiet, framed against a pink sky, with only a few faint columns of rising smoke marring the view. The city's newest tenant crawled onto her stone overhang to perch and stretch, flapping her wings with several rapid beats before indulging in a wide yawn. Her lax mood snapped in half at the unpleasant twinge that ran backward through her nose. With a snort, she remembered: the dagger.

Again, she tried grasping at it with her thumbclaw, growling in frustration as the tact failed once more. Her limited dexterity would not suffice. Twisting around, she laid upon her side, head ducked underneath her own wing, and tried to pry it out with her freed hindclaw. The growls escalated into a frustrated snarl as she only succeeded in gouging her snout open with her own talons. Flustered, she took to the air.

As the gray dovah discovered in the coming days, life in Whiterun was not without its difficulties - for her, or her reluctant neighbors.

With her senses sharper than any mortal's, she heard of and saw more

of what transpired around the bluff than those who only went about their day-to-day business. Passing travellers were always rife with gossip. Slithering out of her den on clear nights, she would hide herself in the shadowy recesses of the rolling terrain, a safe distance from the roads, and listen. Or, when faced with an overcast sky, she would take flight and circle, like a great scavenger of names and information. Gleaning only portions of conversations between the travellers, her picture of the local politics of Whiterun came together painfully slow.

Suffice it to say, the "jewel of Tamriel" had its share of miscreant troubles.

Defending her den from becoming a hotspot frequented by bears or sabre cats turned out to be more straightforward work, and made for a steady supply of prey if nothing else. Their burnt and broken bodies soon came to litter the ground around her dwelling. Reksadonviing used the great piles of excavated dirt to bury the more pungent corpses, saving the skulls to adorn the perimeter of her small territory, and made a point of flying to a nearby lake every few days to wash. Most mortals' noses were dull enough to notice only the worst stinks, but she didn't feel like taking chances.

All the while, her nose itched fiercely. Lacking the tools to remove the dagger, she scratched her face against tree trunks and boulders. The initial sting had spread, filling her muzzle with a heated, fuzzy sensation that was altogether unpleasant. Her self-inflicted wound grew raw and began to fester. The scales around the afflict were turning brittle and flaky.

She appraised her problem one afternoon following an after-meal wash. Water darkened the leather straps of the unsightly weapon stuck in her face. The dagger had been thrust in at a shallow angle, with the handle bent too far back toward her eyes. She could not pry it free without removing her nose spur along with it, or clawing her muzzle wide open.

It had to come out. Still, she did not yet feel confident enough to ask more favors of Balgruuf or his officials. Their arrangement was equal without this added, unwanted factor offsetting the balance. So far she had not proven her additional worth beyond a shadow of a doubt.

The townsfolk would even less inclined to help her. Dragonsreach aside, Reksadonviing didn't violate the sanctity that was Whiterun's city walls, but even the occasional peek into the Wind or Plains District was met with angry voices. Those who tended the farms behaved no differently, reigning in their agitated livestock whenever she crawled too close, waving her away with hands or garden rakes. Dogs stood and barked for hours at as little as a whiff of her scent on the wind.

Each evening she returned to her den feeling less and less endeared to her immediate company, wondering again if going her own way had really been what she was meant for. Was it too late to leave Skyrim and rejoin Paarthurnax? Or find Odahviing, reclaim a new territory, become the simple brood female she had wanted to avoid being?

Time typically meant little to one whose race could live for centuries on end. But a mere two weeks of skulking around the city's

outskirts left Reksadonviing craving \_tinvaak\_, some kind of conversation beyond a "begone, dragon".

How had Paarthurmax stayed sane all those years in seclusion?

Alduin. He had had a goal in mind to meditate on while guarding the Time Wound.

Her eyes went back to the dagger. Meditation alone wouldn't get rid of it. She would have to take a risk, reach across the proverbial line in the sand.

Game for a laugh, fate forced her winged hand, the very same morning she woke up intent on making that faithful leap. The first contingent of bandits who tried to retake the overhang appeared as if from nowhere. Unprepared but not completely unorganized, Reksadonviing fought a brief if frenzied battle. Swords rended the vulnerable folds of her wings. Arrowheads found their way between the thick scales at the back of her neck as she twisted this way and that, biting at her opponents with flame-laced teeth. The largest of their number, a stubborn ox of an orc, proved the most challenging, and soon became the last one standing. Even as she swept his legs out from under him, his raised shield collided with her sore nose.

Her vision, to her rage and dismay, went askew. Reksadonviing moved on instinct, biting down with every ounce of strength her jaw had, and shook her head. Spine cracked, the orc's scream of defeat was cut short. She stood there, mouth clamped around her dispatched target, panting with ragged, heaving breaths until the ache in her head subsided and her vision steadied. Finally prying her teeth loose of the still-twitching body, she spat in disgust and slowly, carefully made her way up the grassy incline beside the den.

She growled. This was what she had been afraid of: the onset of a \_qiistur\_, a fever. The infection had numbed her facial nerves to the point only a sharp strike would bring the pain into focus, which wasn't to say how the underlying damage might affect her senses in the long term if not treated soon. Something would have to be done about it, now.

Loathing her new sensitivity, Reksadonviing climbed across the rocks below Dragonsreach's north face. Not daring to fly in this state, she paid no mind to how awkward her progress must have looked to the helmeted watchmen above. Her destination was just over the east wall, she could smell it even with the edges of her sight turned blurry.

The Skyforge never slept. Its ever-burning maw emitted enough heat to be smelt for miles on a breezy day. Drawing closer, Reksadonviing heard the steady, rhymic clangs of the forge's omnipresent smith, and smelled the smoke. Her quills trembled. Steeling herself, she crept the last few feet and reached up, gingerly resting a thumbclaw against the wall before slowly lifting herself into view beside the great stone bird.

"Eorlund Gray-Mane?"

His discerned \_lack\_ of response was the last she would have anticipated.

"Aye?"

With each strike of the tempering hammer, sparks continued to fly from the red-hot slab of metal on the anvil. Reksadonviing assumed it was in the progress of becoming a sword. She hesitated to speak again, noting how the blacksmith's eyes never lifted from his work.

"Oi, you have business there, dragon?"

She blinked and glanced down. In the yard below, a cross-armed warrior, clad in leather garb, a sword at his hip, glowered up at her, red eyes full of nothing save suspicion.

Reksadonviing frowned, the combined ache of the dagger, her wounds, and the arrow shafts ignored for the moment. "What of it if I do, elf?"

A shrewd smile twisted the dunmer's angular features. "Then you should know ol' Eorlund doesn't deal with those lacking in gold. Not that I can fathom what you could possibly want from him that'd warrant it, anyway. You'd be better off trying to sleep away those hurts."

"Your advice is noted."

She almost didn't feel the thrown stone that bounced off her cheek. The dovah froze, temporarily mired in abject disbelief, slowly craned her neck to look back at the guilty party.

The warrior stood his ground, chest puffed out. "Hey, that wasn't to say you're free to hover in the meantime. Smells enough around here without some fetid - "

A plunging hiss from the Skyforge interrupted Reksadonviing's next primed retort. "Let it go, Athis." Eorlund's grizzled accent, sounding decidedly deadpan, drew Reksadonviing's ear and eyes back to the smith. He pulled a stained rag from his belt and casually wiped his hands. "I'll hear what she has to say first."

Athis gave a scoff, turning away with a dismissive wave. "All right, I've said my piece."

Eorlund Gray-Mane scarcely glanced up from his hands until the door to Jorrvaskr thumped shut. With calm restored, he paid his visitor an unimpressed look. "Well, what'll it be, lass?"

Reksadonviing blinked again, dumbfounded. She couldn't help asking: "You're not surprised?"

"I got over that months ago. Used to seeing your kind passing by nowadays, even if those sightings have been a little less frequent of late."

"And... you're not averse to the idea of talking to me?"

"All the hold knows you're here. Last I checked, it was on peaceful terms."

Quills relaxed, the grayscaled dovah felt a flush of gratification. The blood on her maw could have been misinterpreted, but Eorlund had decided to look past it. "You aren't mistaken, \_zoh\_."

"How might I be of service?"

Already placing a small measure of trust in the renowned blacksmith, she leaned forward. "These nuisances. I wish to be rid of them."

To his credit, Eorlund didn't probe with hands nor unnecessary questions. His gaze simply flitted from the dagger to the feathered shafts and back again. Nor did the sorry, weeping state of her obvious facial wound seem to perturb him. His eyebrows hiked up. "Bandits?"

"I would not have sought you out were I able to solve the problem myself."

"Aye. The jarl refused you this favor?"

Her jaw tightened. "I..."

"Now isn't that a sight?"

Quills flaring, her attention flitted back to Jorrvaskr. Two other warriors, a man and a woman, had appeared in the shadows of the porch. A smirking Athis stood beside them. "Told ya I wasn't jesting."

Reksadonviing bristled with accusation. "I thought you had said your piece, \_fahliil\_."

Athis shrugged. "Doesn't mean my Shield-Siblings have."

Eorlund's impartial tone and expression finally darkened with some annoyance. "Athis - "

"Never in all my days." The fair-skinned man, already listing at this early hour, grinned lopsidedly. Reksadonviing could smell the musk of ale on his breath, and at once understood the cause of his slurred ranting. He walked/stumbled out into the yard, hand shielding his eyes as if he were straining to see from a great distance. "Ria, you believe this?"

Only the imperial looked genuinely nervous, arms around herself. Reksadonviing noticed how a slight tremble went through her as their eyes met. "Hard not to believe it, Torvar."

An ordinary dovah might have preened and relished in the attention of such subjects once. But as these were no ordinary circumstances, Reksadonviing huffed in annoyance. She looked back to Eorlund, eyes beseeching. "Nevermind our audience, \_heimiik\_. \_Vis hi hiif zey?\_"

She couldn't bare to put the request in Tamrielic. Few shames compared to the thought that a dovah would ask aid of a mortal.

Thankfully, for Eorlund, the inference was clear enough. He nodded. "Aye, I can remove the weapons, quick as you like. But you'll have to

find someone else to do the patchin', lass."

"Fair enough. And your price?"

"We'll discuss that later, when you find the strength."

Though tempted to ask, the gray dovah clamped her mouth shut before her gape became noticable. The cryptic nature of the blacksmith's answer continued to echo around her thoughts as she watched him gather and arrange a few select instruments.

The onlookers of Jorrvaskr continued to watch as Eorlund made his preparations, as unbothered as if he had done operations of this caliber his entire life. Carefully, Reksadonviing climbed up to stand precariously upon the city's perimeter wall, using her wing to brace herself from falling into the training yard. The other rested draped across the wing of the Skyforge. Without facing Jorrvaskr pulled up a wooden stool, seated himself, and gestured to the empty floor beside him.

Mindful to keep her movements slow and her teeth unbared, Reksadonviing stretched her neck out to lower her head, lying her chin against the floor beside his feet.

Eorlund laid a hand - thick and calloused - against the armored ridge beneath his client's eye. He eyed the protruding dagger handle, stuck firmly between nostril and horn, for a long moment before he spoke, quietly.

"Now relax. We both know this is gonna hurt. How much and for how long, that's for you to decide, dragon."

Reksadonviing exhaled uneasily, hindclaws clenched. "\_Geh, zoh.\_ Do what needs to be done."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Notes:<strong> Yeah. Herein lies the other big motivator that inspired me to want to write this story - the Companions. Werewolves and dragons, me likes the possibilities of this combination. :3

But readers probably will note the absence those characters who compromise the Circle. While this story does take place post Alduin's questline, the various other lines are still open to interperation. I'm still not sure if "Forge" is to take place pre or post Companions questline, but - as always - I'm open to suggestions. Eorlund calling in an IOU is as much as I've thought out at this point.

Dov terms used:

><em>fahliil<em> - elf

><em>heimiik<em> - smith

><em>Vis hi hiif zey <em>- can you help me?

><em>zoh<em> - sir

## 5. Ties

**\*\*Disclaimer:\*\*** Skyrim and all its canon content are the property of Bethesda Game Studios. No infringement is intended.

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**\*\*Notes:\*\*** Review/alert thanks go out to cbosw5, ChemicalZ, TheCrimsonScholar, Ddragon21, and OMG stories. And thanks to all those intrigued enough to click their way here. Go ahead and fav/alert/run as you please. I don't mind. :)

Back to the narrative. It's been a fun write so far.

\* \* \*

><p>"Count of three: one, two - "<p>

With a firm yank, the blade of the dagger was pulled free.

Reksadonviing made a strangled sound, halfway between a roar and a curse. Her vision reeled. Fresh, dark blood spurted from the wound and ran in thick rivulets down her nose and chin. Shoulders hunching, she clamped her eyes shut and pulled away from Eorlund. Knowing the procedure would hurt had only soothed so much.

A few minutes of heavy silence ticked by as the gray dovah crouched beside the Skyforge, wings and tail suddenly trembling. She fought her instincts to lash out, and kept her head down, listening to the pained wheeze of every inhale and exhale she tried to draw through her good nostril, the wet, bubbling splutter of the other. Gradually, she pried her eyes open, and focused on the soothing words the blacksmith had been speaking.

"Easy. You're halfway there, lass."

Belatedly, she noticed the presence of something hot and simmering being brought closer to her face. Too late, she realized what purpose the glowing-red iron served until it was pressed across her open wound.

Skin blistering, Reksadonviing almost bucked again. Eorlund's free hand grabbed the side of her jaw, commanding her to stay still. She felt and heard steam rise from her face as the trails of blood crackled fiercely in the heat and began to slow.

This time, she let a cry, loud and heartfelt, escape:  
"\_Paak!\_"

Later, she would understand the thinking behind his choice to use superheated metal to seal the gash. Magic would not have immediately stopped the bleeding, and traditional stitches were of no use to a creature coated in armored scales. But in the meantime, it still hurt as much as a clawing from Alduin.

The next thing she heard was footsteps, and voices besides Eorlund's. Half of a still-sleepy Whiterun must have awoken at her shout. Reksadonviing cracked her eyes open, squinting against the pain and heat, and growled at what she saw. Her quills flared.

No. Not half of Whiterun. Just Athis and his friends. And half a dozen helmeted guards.



They had dared to ascend the curving set of steps that led up to the Skyforge. Torvar and Ria lingered to either side of Athis, looking on with expressions of alarm, hands poised as if to draw their weapons.

"Oh, for the love of - " Eorlund seemed no less pleased with the would-be interventation than his 'patient'. Hands still in place, he glared over his shoulder. "I said, I have it under \_control\_."

"Barely, old man. She looks ready to murder you so much as look at you!"

"But she hasn't, and you three aren't helping matters with your commentary."

"\_Zu'u ziist tol.\_" Reksadonviing muttered between clenched fangs, resisting every urge to shake off the grip on her face. At the prompting glare Athis leveled at her, she switched tongues. "That is, I agree."

The dunmer remained tense, one fist clenched, the other hand resting on his scabbard. His gaze flitted from Eorlund, to the corroded dagger lying innocently on the stone tiles, to the splatters of blood beside the blacksmith's feet, and back. "Fine mess she's made of things."

"Consider yourself lucky I don't make you wash it off in recompense for all the heckling." As the bloodletting stopped, Eorlund peeled the semi-cooled iron off, and brandished it like a weapon. "Now clear out, all o' you."

His tone left no room for them to argue further. With the worst of the agony passed, Reksadonviing sagged in relief. She placed a bracing thumbclaw before herself, and let her eyelids droop shut, focusing on the steadying of her spiked heartrate. Her fever was by no means cured, but the throbbing cause of it was now gone. A peculiar numbness had taken its place.

"Apologies for the intrusion, lass." Eorlund's tone softened. She heard him pull up the discarded stool again to sit beside her. "Little goes on around the Skyforge without the Companions knowin' about it."

"\_Bolaav\_, I expected as much," the dovah muttered. The corner of her mouth twitched as she felt the blacksmith's hand settle on her brow, and stay there. She sighed out of thought, green eyes opening. "Is the \_fahliil\_... Athis... always so forward?"

"Hmph. Nowhere near. Everyone's got their own feelings on the return of dragons, and I suppose that's his way of copin' with one on a mission like yours. It takes some gettin' used to."

They sat in silence for a while. Eorlund turned to inspecting his handiwork, appraising the now-closed flesh, frowning contemplatively at the larger gash adorning Reksadonviing's lip.

"The size of this one, with that level of infection, I don't know if sealing it up is the smartest thing to do. You would do well to

strike some bargain with a healer next."

The dovah quirked her head in agreement, and pulled back her arm to allow access to her plated neck. "The arrows, then."

It proved to be a delicate process by comparison. Reksadonviing held still, guided by Eorlund's instructions to alternatively stretch or curl her neck. Armed with a pair of iron tongs, he pulled them out one by one. The patient winced, refusing to let another outburst get the better of her. Each pinprick of pain meant the successful removal of a steel arrowhead from between her scales.

The only downside was in how long the operation took. The shadows of the forge shrunk as the sun climbed higher in the sky. Eventually a small carpet of discarded shafts joined the blood on the Skyforge floor.

"And... ah, there's the last of them," Eorlund finally proclaimed, tossing a final arrow down.

Reksadonviing sniffed, lifting her head at the sound of feet on the Skyforge stairs - again. She refrained from growling at the familiar scent. \_Not a moment too soon\_.

The blacksmith glanced back and sighed in resignation. The forced patience in his voice was clear: "Yes, Ria?"

The dark-haired woman had the good grace to look sheepish as she stepped forward. Reksadonviing noticed that, besides her metal-studded leather garb, the only other item she carried seemed to be the odd leather purse in her hands. "I'm sorry for interrupting, Eorlund, but I thought you could use this."

"A waterskin, aye." Eorlund turned the item over in his hands, uncorking its tapered end. He wetted the rag at his belt, wiping his hands. "Didn't think healer's work could be as messy as metalwork."

Head lowered, Reksadonviing held still, save for the gentle drip of water off her scales as Eorlund turned to patting her face clean with the same rag. At that moment, the dovah didn't think to tell him to stop. She was too busy staring at their visitor.

Ria, with her face flushed a shade darker, stood awkwardly before her. Her hands found a tattered edge of fur at her hip, fingers nervously making play of the material as they regarded each other. The steadiness of her eyes belied her fidgety tells. "So... you're Reksa?"

The grayscaled dovah huffed softly, but felt no irritation. Word of her alias had gotten around like everything else concerning her presence. "According to your esteemed jarl. My full name is Reksadonviing."

Her visitor smiled uneasily. "That explains the nickname."

"Ria," Eorlund chided, without looking up.

"It's all right, \_heimiik\_." Reksadonviing blinked as the rag brushed against a sore spot. "That is the extent to which I insist. To be

called Reksha is better than merely being referred to as 'dragon' all the time."

The openness of her response seemed to mollify Ria's nerves. She shifted her weight to one leg, arms loosely crossed before her. "Makes sense. Your full name seems like a mouthful, even for you."

"\_Folov\_. It isn't the one I was given upon hatching, if that tells you anything."

"I'd be lying to say I wasn't wondering. The opportunity to talk to one of you... your kind, people say it can't be done."

"When both parties are civil enough, I believed it could happen," Eorlund admitted. "Just had to wait for the right dragon to come along, like the red one they snared up in Dragonsreach. Dragonborn had no trouble talking to him, by what I heard."

The present dovah swallowed at the thought of Odahviing and said nothing.

Ria, thankfully, was looking elsewhere, toward the skies. "Wonder where he's gone since then. With Alduin dead - "

"We're free to do as we please," Reksadonviing cut in, uncaring for how sternly her words bit. "Odahviing chose his calling, as I have mine."

A tense moment later, she gently pulled away from Eorlund's hands and straightened up, head bowed as she gazed down at the two humans.

"My apologies. You can imagine it's a sensitive subject."

Ria raised a lithe eyebrow. "Odahviing?"

Reksadonviing paused, then relented, haltingly, "The red one. He and I are some of... the few Dov who did not leave Skyrim with the rest of our race."

"And of all the places you could have gone, you came to Whiterun," Ria deduced. "Seems like you might be as curious of us as we are of you."

There was the temptation to further explain herself. Reksadonviing resisted. "Indeed."

"Do you plan to stay long?"

"\_Geh\_, outside the walls. It is where I've felt most welcome as of yet," Reksadonviing flexed her long fingers, gently ruffling the folds of her wings. She paid a glance to the surroundings beyond the Skyforge. "Never mind me conforming to the physical incompatibilities of your city would be downright impossible."

"Redguard agents haunting the Bannered Mare, bandits at the gate, Stormcloaks in the hills," Eorlund scoffed deeply, a sound that passed for him as a laugh. He shared a knowing look with Ria. "That'd be the \_least\_ of your problems among us, lass."

Reksadonviing frowned. "Then let us keep things simple - your price. At what time do you intend to collect?"

"I told you, when you have your strength back. A dragon with a sore nose isn't as useful as a healthy one."

Her fevered skin flushed a few degrees hotter at the reminder, but she stifled the irritation.

"\_Bolaav\_. I'll take my leave, then."

"Reksa, one last question," Ria reached forward, stopping short at the incredulous look the dovah levelled at her. "Perhaps... you'll pay call to Jorrvaskr sometime soon?"

"\_Nid\_." Reksadonviing's tone went flat, quills folding behind her cheeks. She started to back away, awkwardly, like a great scaled bat. Only when the hopeful look in Ria's face failed to disintegrate did she pause, sigh, and add, "You do understand a mead hall full of honorable ruffians might not be the best place for me, \_kon\_?"

"Ruffians isn't the word you want to use around them, lass," Eorlund warned.

"It's close to the outer wall," Ria explained, undaunted, as though citing reasons such an occasion were possible. "You need not speak if you don't wish to. Spend an afternoon in our company at least."

Perched by the stone bird, Reksadonviing mused quietly for several minutes. She watched Ria help Eorlund tidy the forge, wiping away the bloodstains. The arrangement sounded plausible, a possible route into making some stronger ties to Whiterun's citizens.

So long as it only involved Ria. But as Eorlund said of the Skyforge, little went on around Jorrvaskr without all its inhabitants knowing of it. Athis was the only individual the dovah could see objecting to her presence. Torvar, by the look of him, would be in a pleasant mead-induced fuzz unless the mood of his fellows turned sour. But what of the rest, the more seasoned ranks? How would they react?

How many of them had had occasion to clean Dov blood from their weapons?

The Skyforge was cleaner than it had been in days by the time Reksadonviing spoke again.

"Your... invitation is all the permission I require?"

"Guests come and go all the time," Ria piped up, smirking. "Why should you be no different?"

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Notes:<strong> Another short chapter, I know, with a rushed ending. Just trying not to make these conversations too long-winded, or too bogged down in technicalities. And I'm thinking of finally pegging "Forge" as a (primarily) drama/friendship story. Sound about right?

I'll be working much of the next week. So updates won't be as frequent as they have been. I'll be taking notes in the meantime as to what to do with the plot.

Dov terms/phrases:

><em>bolaav<em> - grant / granted  
><em>folov<em> - correct  
><em>geh<em> - yes  
><em>kon<em> - girl  
><em>nid<em> - no  
><em>zu'u ziist tol <em>- I second that

## 6. Differ

**\*\*Disclaimer:\*\*** Skyrim and all its canon content are the property of Bethesda Game Studios. No infringement is intended.

Reksadonviing and any unrecognizable names are characters of my own devising.

**\*\*Notes:\*\*** Fav/alert thanks to GaarasMyBoyyz, kali yugah, and Winters-Dawn1221.

Another flashback chapter, more grounded and less vague than the first. Hope it further clarifies a few things.

\* \* \*

><p><em>They were different.<em>

\_But as sentimentality was a concept that held no meaning for the Dov, it only gave the drakes all the more reason to taunt and ridicule them. So as a general rule, the females of the creche did not meddle in the feud that their counterparts waged with the Jul.\_

\_Since rekindling them, Alduin had only addressed the creche, his '\_kaviir\_' the lesser drakes joked, once. They only numbered at a dozen, young females uninterred from a mass grave thought to have been buried in the Second Era, and it was the World-Eater's claim he intended them to stay in hiding until the skies of Keizaal were safe.\_

\_Safe from what?\_

\_Reksadonviing cared naught. She never asked for any of it. Brought back to a life of constant torment and second-guessing, she knew it was only her inborn desire for survival that kept her breathing from day to day. Or that had been the case at first, before Odahviing wormed his way into her affections.\_

\_What she lacked was \_rel\_ - the desire to dominate - that Alduin and her fellows found so distasteful. Thought to be a side effect of mixing bloodlines without the proper precautions, the wrong blessings read and one too few sacrifices made, some said it was no wonder why her clutch-sisters' whereabouts, and therefore remains, were left unrecorded by the Dovah Zaag.\_

\_"Which begs the question," Keinlassrahgots went on, one afternoon while they lounged in the sunshine upon her altar. "Why were your bones buried alongside mine?"\_

\_Despite what understanding they had managed to reach, Reksadonviing dared not meet the larger female's eyes. She had no clear answer to give. A dead dovah, lesser drakes and especially females, typically had no will over what became of their bodies after death. Those that were slain, they were hardly responsible for what the Blades later did with their corpses, after all.\_

\_"Hinsk?" the gray finally supplied, managing a shy sideways glance in addressing her superior.\_

\_Keinlassrahgots eyes, a vivid yellow, darted upward at the distant sound of a roar. Both females listened, but soon relaxed, as no familiar set of wings crested the valley walls. "That would be the simplest possibility. But as you and I both know, simple has no place in Dov lore."\_

\_"Jul have always been simple at heart," Reksadonviing muttered, noncommitted to the conversation at large, lying her head across a folded wing. The previous night's stay on the valley floor rendered her sore and cold. She wanted only to rest, melt the chill from her scales. But sharing a tier of Keinlassrahgots perch came with its price. "Had they been more forethoughtful they would not have made it so easy for Alduin to find us."\_

\_"Perhaps. But things have changed a great deal since our elders' time. I've heard the drakes speak ill of why those who have fallen to the Dovahkiin perished so easily. The simplest mistakes made in each battle proved to be their undoing."\_

\_"Lore notwithstanding, perhaps it should be amended a place in battle tactics." Eyes closed, Reksadonviing heard a rasp of scales dragging on stone, claws clicking their way closer. She opened her eyes with a sigh. "Please, not again."\_

\_Keinlassrahgots nudged her insistently. "Up. Your body has spent enough time resting."\_

\_Knowing the argument only grow less encouraging and eke more toward violent, Reksadonviing wearily unfolded her limbs and stood up. The creak of her scales and spines was audible as she stretched. "Yet another reason I envy you \_ruv sos."\_

\_"You don't give yourself enough credit, \_briinah\_. No \_joor sos\_ I've known are as stubborn as you've proven yourself to be."\_

\_"And you've known how many besides me?" Reksadonviing's mouth quirked up in the barest of smiles.\_

\_Keinlassrahgots nipped at her shoulder in rebuke, teeth grazing her scales. The recipient hardly flinched, as it was only a subtle reminder to the younger female that backtalk would not be tolerated. "Enough of that. The winds are favorable right now. Better you keep your strength than to let it wane."\_

\_"Geh, dii reg."\_

\_Reksadonviing gathered herself and leapt from the altar, indulging in a moment of freefall before swooping upward on the next chilly updraft her wings caught. She turned and saw her bully-turned-host also take flight, to circle and observe. Granted a moment alone, the grayscaled let her thoughts wander.\_

Joor sos \_- mortal blood. The term was one born of myth and supposition. It was used to summarily describe those few Dov in a generation who did not thirst for conquest with the same bloodlust as their parents. Mixing bloodlines were thought to be the primary cause, and why the other Dov thought of her as \_vomedass - \_different.\_

\_There were always a few variants. Keinlassrahgots, though a purebred fo dovah, ruthless as the harshest Keizaal blizzard, didn't fit her breed's own descriptors to a tee. The color of her scales beared that out, more a distant-ocean blue laced in black than slate gray and ghostly white. Her yellow eyes seemed more suited to less-sturdy greenscaled forest dragons. Her conformation was the same: a stout body with broad shoulders and ridged hips. Though he would never say as much, Alduin had to have taken a shine to her because of more than personality (something which had since proved more faceted than other females of the creche said).\_

If he could see us now...

\_Reksadonviing veered away so as to give her companion space to fly, but to stay within visual range. There would have been Oblivion to pay. The gray dovah knew the World-Eater would rather see her perish altogether, and Keinlassrahgots should he ever learn of her 'treachery', weeded out by natural selection. Perhaps her recent growth of a backbone had impressed him, albeit in the wrong ways, or he found her antics a welcome bit of amusement as his campaign for domination went more and more sour.\_

\_The outcome was always the same as his patience would finally snap. With a cursory mauling, he would hound her from a given perch, then offer her the 'choice' to spend the night on the valley floor or repent for her words.\_

\_Typically, she would have submitted. But stubbornness and loyalty to the one being who had shown her geniality kept her from it. Whatever passed for love among the Dov had sunk its teeth deep into her brain. Even if she never saw Odahviing again, the memories of his actions were enough to make her believe there was another side to Dov society that could arise, but only under the right conditions.\_

\_Keinlassrahgots was case in point. Like Alduin, she would never admit to having a 'soft side', but Reksadonviing now knew different. The grayscaled had already made a pact with herself to never disclose what her once-superior had done under the cover of night, shielding her from the snow and cold.\_

\_They had spoken little of the matter as yet, and probably would not. Pride would keep Keinlassrahgots from it, and Reksadonviing's sense of self-preservation would agree.\_

\_Mind made up, she turned her attention to flight. The sun was high and bright today, alighting the stray snowflakes that wafted through

the air with little glints. Reksadonviing flapped with several strong strokes of her wings, as yet untattered by true battle, and gained altitude, cresting one of the valley walls to look at the mountain range beyond. She forgot the ache of her mending wounds at the marvelous, sprawling sight.\_

\_The Jul knew this place as the Velothi Mountains. It was a peculiar place for the creche to hide, in hindsight, but Alduin had played against the expectations of their foes. While a pattern had emerged in what direction he unearthed his comrades, one by one, the Rekindled Creche were something of a trump card. Lesser drakes had been recruited to transport their skeletons to this valley, heavily wooded and only host to a few weather-worn temples, far from the burial site whose location had become a jealously-guarded secret.\_

\_Here was where they were to stay until further notice.\_

\_Those same drakes had become their unwanted guards. Squabbles for food and company were becoming more commonplace. Reksadonviing supposed it was fortunate Keinlassrahgot had decided to take pity on her, the outcast afflicted dually with mixed blood and emotions. With Odahviing gone, the older female was a passible substitute.\_

\_"\_Fo Krah Diin!\_"\_

\_Reksadonviing yelped and jiggled aside as a stream of flying ice shot up from below. The cold air only managed to graze her tail. Keinlassrahgot, climbing sharply on an updraft, soared past her with a laugh. Wisps of frosty air wafted from her mouth. Pegging the game that was being played, the smaller dovah rolled away, wing over wing, and flapped to gain speed.\_

\_Keeping up appearances was the priority now. Testing each other's prowess in the air was a typical display of mental sharpness and physical fortitude. For the drakes it was a chance to show off. For the creche it was a means of stress relief.\_

\_"Let's see how long you can evade me, \_sahlo.\_."\_

\_Reksadonviing spat a cloud of snow by way of reply, and dove through it, dispersing the flakes in a glittering veil.\_

\_A multitude of cries and roars rang out from ledges all around. Whether they were of approval or distain, Reksadonviing cared not. Their audience was dispersed far enough between perches that she did not think the other females join in. Keinlassrahgot was to them what Alduin was to what remained of the Dov. Her game, her rules, her players.\_

\_They flew low, brushing the stringy tops of pine trees, wings dipping as they made turns through open meadows. Bears snarled from their dens in outrage. Deer and wolves bolted in terror. Reksadonviing led her persuer on an entire circuit of the valley's forests, nimbly avoiding the bursts of frost that closed distances allowed. Her senses reeled with the speed of the chase, but for the time being she could forget her troubles.\_

\_One such meadow, rimmed with trees nursing broken branches, the imprint of where she had lain was still visible in the snow. Both



females bypassed it without a backwards glance, focused only on the present as they were.\_

\_This was as close to fun as they could manage nowadays.\_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Notes:<strong> I lied about the wait. Short chapter is short. ^^;

Keinlassrahgot, whose name was derived from the Dov translation of the loose meaning of my own, was spontaneously coined in chapter three. This was my attempt to further dimensionalize her (working out a possible role/fate for her in future chapters), as well as what life in the creche entailed.

Dov terms/phrases:

><em>briinah<em> - sister  
><em>dii reg <em>- my lady  
><em>Dovah Zaag <em>- the Dragon Cult  
><em>hinsk<em> - ignorance  
><em>joor sos<em> - mortal blood  
><em>kaviir<em> - harem  
><em>rel<em> - domination  
><em>ruv sos <em>- pure blood  
><em>tuz<em> - the Blades

## 7. Whelp

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**\*\*Notes:\*\*** Fav/alert thanks go out to Apocalypse Survivor and TheDragonEmpress.

\* \* \*

><p>Contrary to what the dovah expected, Ria proved insistent in her want to get to know her.<p>

"Oh, honestly. You look \_fine\_."

Reksadonviing's attention didn't break from that of her reflection in the crystal-clear spring. She remained crouched at its edge, still as a statue, reveling in the atrocity that was her mangled visage, mirrored back on the water's placid surface. Or that was how she wanted to make herself seem. Acting the part was key. This was as much a test of her resolve as the girl's.

"You think they'll think less of seeing you for a little mud? Scars might as well be Jorrvaskr's definition of body art."

The spaded tip of the dovah's tail twitched like a cat's, betraying feigned anxieties. She told herself to remain tense, wings arranged just so around herself, refusing to look aside as the footsteps drew closer.

Ria's hand, so smooth and brittle-looking, reached around into her field of vision. Her fingers brushed against Reksadonviing's muzzle, palm pressed over the sealed gash, avoiding the claw wound that had continued to simmer and fester.

More alarming, though, were the weak wisps of gold light that danced about said hand - imbued with a healing spell.

Deciding to drop the statuesque ruse, Reksadonviing snorted at the touch like an affronted horse, sharply turning her head to look down at the now-startled Imperial. "Is that why I asked you here, \_joor\_, to critique my appearance?"

"N-no."

Where the stutter might have once given her a thrill of satisfaction, to know she could strike fear into another being's heart, the gray dovah backpeddled. Her jowl quills folded and she looked away, as if embarrassed by the schizophrenic turn in mood. "Ah, my apologies, girl. \_Krosis.\_ I forgot myself for a moment."

Neither of them had reason to think this meeting had been arranged purely on chance. A few tense days had passed since the operation at the Skyforge. Reksadonviing had continued to mull over Ria's invitation, watching what she could of Jorrvaskr from the air. In a few instances, she had crept close again, using the city wall for cover, and eavesdropped on what conversations were held in the hall's training yard.

Few exchanges didn't defer to a topic which somehow related to her, the threat she posed, the supposed betrayal she would enact once she had the city's collective trust. What she had since learned was that the Companions were no guild to turn one's nose up at. A select few of their members would not hesitate to throttle or gut their opponent than suffer accusations of being simple thugs only motivated by gold.

Reksadonviing wanted to know a little more about who these people were whom she was being asked to meet. The best way she could think to do that: to convene a meeting in secret, in the forests west of Falkreath, with the one of their number who decided to make such a request. Whether it was to call Ria's bluff or discover to what extent she wished to work her way into the wayward dovah's good graces, that remained to be seen.

Said warrior, following her nearly-spited reception, was quick to forgive her host. She did not say as much, but she carefully stepped around past Reksadonviing's furled wing. She knelt by the pond and splashed water on her face. Torchbugs hovered nearby in the early evening air, their yellow light cast onto the new ripples. "Don't worry about it, Reksa. I know I kept you waiting. And with no one to watch your den - "

"That's the least of my concerns," the dovah rumbled. "I took it by force once, and can do so again."

"It must have been an interesting battle. Will you tell the story to the others?" Ria, face lighting up again with the same naive hopefulness it had shown at the Skyforge, sat down on the bank, arms

folded around her knees like a child eager for an exciting campfire story.

Reksadonviing scoffed and shook her head, unsure of whether to feel amused or disbelieving of the trust this woman was already granting her. Nothing ever came to her easy. Why should this be any different?

"Please. Let us skip the pleasantries. I summoned you here to discuss more prudent matters."

"Such as?"

"Jorrvaskr. I'm not so sure I will be welcome there."

Ria tilted her head. Her eyes went distant for a moment as she thought the response over, and then glanced back. "Well, besides the obvious, why not?"

Reksadonviing's tail twitched and curled around. She arched her neck up and her head down, dorsal spikes bristling, intent on making an imposing silhouette of herself. "Because if whispers and gossip are anything to base a conclusion on, your fellows have dealt with my kind before, on far less civil terms."

"And you think they won't entertain hearing from you even with my vouch?"

The dovah sighed, praying for patience. "\_Delaal\_, I don't think you would have had the presence of mind to humor me were you a minted \_dovahkriid\_ yourself. Where does that say you fit into your mead hall's hierarchy?"

The smile, knowing and unfaltering, did not fade from Ria's face. "That's one of the best things about the Companions: there is no chain of command. I mean, yes, there's the Circle - our eldest members - and our Harbinger plays adviser to the group as a whole. But no one man or woman is under the jurisdiction of another. We're all free to behave as we please, within the bounds of our oath."

"Hrm. That explains the likes of Athis and... What was the other's name?"

"Torvor," Ria's smile split into a grin. "He thought he hallucinated the whole thing, 'til I showed him the dagger."

\_You kept that blasted thing?\_ Reksadonviing tried not to scowl at the memories. She snapped lazily at a passing torchbug and watched it flit frantically away to mask any reaction. "Then I suppose your fellows are even... anticipating my arrival?"

"Only with a mug of ale or two by means of defense, I can assure you. Dinner utensils aren't very deadly to your kind."

Reksadonviing feigned a pause of contemplation. In reality, a few things her nose had told her didn't immediately make sense. She hadn't been able to correlate which faces matched which scent. But she already had an inkling that questioning Ria would answer nothing of it, even if - at present - she reeked of that same feral

smell.

Time to test the waters.

She rose to her feet in a smooth, deliberate motion. Her ridged skull brushed the overlapping tree branches above. "Return to Whiterun. You and your friends shall have the favor of my company, whenever I feel that may be best."

Flustered, Ria scrambled to stand up. "Now hold on. I didn't hike a day and a half for that to be it."

"\_It\_ is as much time as I've seen fit to spare you, girl. I've agreed to your promise. Do you truly wish to test my patience further?"

Even faced with a smoldering green glare, the imperial stood her ground. Her hands remained loose at her sides. "I don't want to test it at all, Reksa. I thought you came to Whiterun to make allies of its people."

"In due time, yes. That process is simply slow in coming. There can be no room for misunderstandings. For you that may mean a passing fancy, getting the chance to speak to a dovah. For me, it's my very life at stake."

"But you're going about it \_too\_ slowly. People are still afraid of you because you stay away from them," Ria argued. "If anything, you're regressing instead of progressing, letting things stand in your way for fear of going about it the wrong way. It looked to me you could use some help, a different kind than what Eorlund can give. The Companions are your best chance of getting it."

"\_Hiif\_," Reksadonviing growled, quills flaring. She turned sideways, making sure the gap in the trees that led out of the pondside clearing was visible to Ria. Nearby birds chirped in alarm and took flight, but the forest was otherwise quiet. "\_Dovahkriid vis hiif zey?\_"

Ria shrugged. No translation was needed to read the dubiousness in the grayscaled's voice. "I know, it may seem unlikely. But can you name anyone else in Whiterun who might be willing to listen \_and\_ defend themselves if need be? The knowledge they can withstand anything a dragon can bring to a fight might comfort them enough to hear you out."

Reksadonviing blinked, mildly astonished. She hadn't considered that. "And you, what do you take comfort in, that you would risk meeting with a dovah, alone and virtually unarmed?"

From the encroaching darkness, an arrow flew, silent and unexpected as the one who loosed it. Reksadonviing blinked, dumbfounded, as the steel head glanced harmlessly off her muzzle, no more than a few inches short of her eye, to flip end-over-end and splash into the pond.

"Easy," Ria smirked. "A \_dovahkriid\_ guard."

The startled dovah whirled around, holding herself low to the ground. An unfortunate sapling snapped in half at the strike of her lashing

tail. Her eyes scanned the treeline, but saw only empty space between the trunks and undisturbed bush. She sniffed, but only the same peculiar smell she thought Ria could not explain met her nose.

"\_Kolos hi\_"

She froze as Ria's tanned hand reached up to settle on her face for the second time that evening.

"Settle down, Rekxa. It's only Aela."

Growly, panicked breaths quieting, Reksadonviing didn't think to shake off the hand. Her astonishment doubled. Ria had shirked her side of the bargain?

The imperial smiled, eyes apologetic, cheeks flushing. "I'm sorry. After what happened, they couldn't let me 'face' you alone."

"\_Fos \_- you \_told\_ them?" the dovah accused, more surprise than anger coloring her words.

"She didn't even make it out the door."

A lithe figure stepped out of the trees. The soft musk finally had a descriptor, and a face.

Reksadonviing's lips curled up in a defensive, besides ugly, snarl. A deep thrum of discontent reverberated up from her chest.

\_Mungrohiik\_.

Werewolf.

Aela the Huntress looked distinctly unimpressed. "Thought so. Only a whelp would think meeting a dragon alone could ever \_possibly\_ be a good idea." She crossed her arms, a well-worn bow gripped in one hand. "Are you satisfied, Ria? You've seen how fidgety this thing is now, prone to fits of rage, and you want to bring it back to Jorrvaskr?"

The 'whelp' remained where she stood, hand resting on Reksadonviing's face. The vulnerable, contrite look disappeared, and her tone went stern. "That's a very crass generalization, Aela."

"I'm only telling you how I see it."

"This is just posturing. You didn't see what happened the other day. How cautious she was around Eorlund - "

"I saw the dagger. It all could have been a ruse."

Ria made a strange rolling motion with her eyes. Reksadonviing glanced sideways at her. "You're so quick to distrust."

Aela's jaw and fists clenched. "I have my reasons. You haven't been called on to fight a dragon."

"Nor have you had the chance to yet get to know this one," Ria fired

back.

"What is there to know? Honestly, even if you can bring yourself to disregard history and the stories, you haven't seen what these things can do. I have. The carnage that follows is unlike anything petty bandits or highwaymen can wreak."

Ria snapped her fingers, the movement so sudden Reksadonviing nearly ducked away. The gold wisps of light reappeared. "Then think of the advantages having one on our side would grant us."

Unabashed, Ria pressed her spell-charged hand against the scale-stripped skin of the dovah's muzzle. Reksadonviing squinted and grimaced against the new warmth that spread through her face at the touch. The swollen, infected wound seemed to dry in a matter of seconds. The red flesh smoothed itself out with the help of the healing tome, turning gray upon softening, and then slightly pebbled with the makings of new scales rising across its surface.

Aela still appeared unconvinced. "Ysgramor help us," she muttered, striding forward. She pulled the younger girl away by the arm, turning her to be glared straight in the face. "This is nothing to go starry-eyed about, Ria."

Ria bristled again. "It'd be better than what has been happening. She's the talk of the city, always in a negative light. If the Companions could help turn that opinion around, help Dragonsreach foster a greater understanding of dragons - "

"It would sully our name. Farengar can use her as a test subject for all I care."

Backed up against the pond's edge, Reksadonviing's eyes narrowed and her quills flexed uneasily. The werewolf was berating her as though the dovah weren't even standing there. "Sully how?" she demanded, pointedly.

Aela's warpaint-streaked face, whose eyes were a shade of green not so different than the dovah's, glared up at her. "You have the audacity to ask?"

She sounded almost genuinely puzzled.

"My audacity pales in comparison to your lack of benevolence, joor."

"Good. Because I don't seem to recall any point in the past where harboring your ilk ever did Nord kind any favors."

"In the past, no," Ria insisted. "But think of the present, Aela. Whiterun would be the envy of every city in Skyrim if it had a dragon ally. The war wouldn't - "

"Wouldn't what? No matter, because I would refuse," Reskadonviing snorted and shook her head. She had no desire to make a pawn of herself in Keizaal's boiling civil war. "Your vision far outstretches your reach there, girl."

"At least that's one thing we can agree on," Aela begrudgingly admitted. She released Ria's captive arm. "So let us forget this

nonsense."

"May we consult with the Harbinger at least?" Ria relented, with less resolve but still firm with her words. "Let the Circle vote after Reksa has said her piece."

"\_Geh. \_Lest it impugn your guild's sense of... tolerance?" Reksadonviing added, her inference clear. Concerns of misinterpretation had fallen by the wayside. This was a challenge she could see herself holding her ground on.

Aela's gaze turned distant and baleful while she thought, so alike that of a wolf. She spent a long while weighing the argument, bow slung over her back, and paced slowly around, looking the dovah over from all available sides. Ria's eyes followed her every move.

While she had the time, Reksadonviing watched and thought on what little of Aela she had seen here. The woman was not unlike Keinlassrahgot: a spiney, conflicted exterior belying a greater intellect. Given time, perhaps reaching some middle ground with the huntress would have its benefits, different to those knowing Ria afforded her.

Sunset finally vanished from the surrounding forest. The shadows around the clearing darkened to inky black. Ria had struck a torch to light the clearing by the time Aela's private deliberations ended. The huntress placed her hands on her hips and squared her shoulders.

"Fine. One chance, dragon. You may pay call to Jorrvaskr once. If Ria will swear for you so passionately, we're entitled to give you the benefit of the doubt, however slight. Such is how our family functions. You fail to impress, or so much as look at anyone the wrong way, you can find your allies elsewhere. Are we clear?"

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Notes:<strong> Finally, there's one of our werewolves. Even if Reksa's meeting Aela it isn't on the nicest terms, at least the dragon hasn't blurted out any derogative names related to the fact. Yet. :/

>Dov termsphrases:

><em>delaal<em> - honest / honestly

><em>dovahkriid<em> - dragonslayer

><em>fos<em> - what

><em>geh<em> - yes

><em>hiif<em> - help

><em>joor<em> - mortal

><em>kolos hi<em> - where are you

><em>krosis<em> - sorrow (used in context in the place of 'sorry')

## 8. Judge

**\*\*Disclaimer:\*\*** Skyrim and all its canon content are the property of Bethesda Game Studios. No infringement is intended.

Reksadonviing and any unrecognizable names are characters of my own devising.

**\*\*Notes:\*\*** Fav/alert thanks to Bespectacled Dwarf, Fahliil, and Jalking.

You raise a valid point, "Fortunate Son". My dialogue has always erred toward being too elaborate for its own good. Writing in such a manner for so long works for the dragons of Skyrim, it seems, but does tend to bleed over unto other characters, too. I'll try to work on mitigating that from this point forward.

\* \* \*

><p>It was not the most comfortable assembly ever. And Reksadonviing made sure at least one of the Companions knew it.<p>

"This is humiliating."

Ria, leaning against the wall between two sodden straw dummies, arms crossed, cast her visitor a sympathetic look. "It's what you agreed to, Reksa."

Few sights in modern Tamriel were as intimidating as the silhouette of a dragon bearing down on its prey from above. That afternoon, as the mid-season rain commenced again and Reksadonviing landed noisily on the hills behind Jorrvaskr, Ria had been the first to rush out and greet her. The dovah's appearance alone was enough to cause a few guards to come running, only to be turned away by the imperial's words. But said exchange also came with a stern order from them: that the dovah was to remain behind the wall at all times while speaking to the Circle.

Reksadonviing objected after the guards retreated. How was she to make any sort of harmless impression if she could not be allowed to \_see\_ them?

Ria compromised. So now the dovah stood in a most uncomfortable position, with her head and neck lying stretched lengthwise along the top of the city wall like a languid snake. Through the sheets of rain and rising smoke from the pitfires, she looked less like a live, dangerous creature of legend and more like an oddly-placed escarpment.

"It helps put them at ease, knowing you're willing to negotiate if not follow orders."

\_Who, the guards, or your superiors I'm due to meet?\_

"Psh. Are they \_that\_ prone to violence?"

"No. But heeding their word at a time like this could mean much to them. And the less imposing so you seem, the better it all might go."

Reksadonviing ground her fangs instead of growling. Her pinned jowl spines had dug themselves into the scales of her throat. She heard the doors to Jorrvaskr thump open, followed by omnious, clanking footsteps. She looked up, and the discomfort in her neck was immediately forgotten.

From the cover of the back porch, lit by the surrounding pitfires,



four faces all wearing similiar looks of suspicion, albeit an emotion showed in various degrees, stared back at her.

Claws clenching, she stifled another urge to growl. The smell of the werewolf was apparent even at a distance. From their vaguely-lupine stares, the likelihood was she faced four mungrohiik now, not just Aela.

"Fine pet you've got there, Ria."

The imperial, already soaked through in the five minutes she had spent standing in the rain, simply shrugged. Water dripped steadily from her hair and pauldrons. "If you say so."

Thinking this an insult aimed at the one mortal she could dare begin to think of as a friend, Reksadonviing hissed, lips curling. "Duziir jul. Zu'u los nid geinro rez."

"Relax, Reksa. That's just Skjor's attempt at a greeting."

Reksadonviing straightened up, lifting her head out of reach of the hand Ria lifted toward her face. Her quills flared. "Relax? There is little about this meeting any of us may find funny."

"True. And again, I'm surprised to find we can agree on something," Aela remarked, hands on her hips.

"You sound anything but surprised, mortal."

"Maybe I show it in ways you can't recognize, dragon."

"Can we kindly move past the petty accusations before they drive us all mad?" one of the dark-haired men, not Skjor, spoke up. Already he sounded weary of the exchange taking place before him. "I, for one, was told this was to be a peaceful meeting."

Taking the hint, Reksadonviing scoffed, exhaling hot air, and mutely lowered her head down to yard level.

Ria patted the dovah's cheek in reassurance, smiling another apologetic smile.

"Hmph," Skjor's squared expression and shoulders remained tense. "Kodlak will join us soon. Until then, Ria, if you would step away?"

The imperial shook her head at the man's beckoning gesture. "I think it's better if I stayed close, Skjor."

"That's an order."

"What if I brought her closer instead?"

The words sounded half like a suggestion, the other half a dare. Reksadonviing almost smirked at the potential for amusement, even at the cost of a little of her already-mediocre supply of trust.

From the look of it, Jorrvaskr's training yard could prove a tight fit, and no doubt the elder Companions would not tolerate the idea of

a dovah laying one scale on their mead hall. But Skjor's stunned failure to respond to Reksadonviing gave all the pause she needed to broach the subject.

"Stand aside, then, \_kon\_."

Though she appeared startled at the dovah's immediate agreement, Ria skirted out of the way. Reaching up to grip the dividing wall, the gray dovah furled her wings tightly, waited until the imperial had joined the others, and slithered over.

"Gods preserve us..."

Reksadonviing snorted and shook rainwater from her eyes, paying little heed to the nord's awed mutterance. Arms held at her sides, she curled herself upon the cobbled ground. Her build was slight enough to accommodate a closer proximity to the mead hall after all.

Still, she was careful to refrain from touching any of the woodwork. Tucking her limbs beneath her body, she laid her head along one folded wing, looking up from the foot of the staircase.

"Satisfied?" Skjor's dubious look failed to vanish. Reksadonviing sighed and elaborated, "Think, \_joor\_. This is a most awkward position to put myself in, were it my intent to attack. Whereas you and your fellows have every means to assail me, should you choose."

"Just don't give us a reason, and you'll have nothing to worry about," the remaining Companion - as yet silent - finally grumbled.

"That wasn't to say I was worried. I've been told you're an honorable guild."

For a moment, none of them responded. Skjor glanced at his fellows as if to silently gauge their lack of reactions. Just as wordlessly, the Circle then seated themselves on opposite sides of a weather-worn dining table. Ria pulled up a chair between the two sides, at the porch's edge, closest to the dovah.

Skjor turned his chair to face Reksadonviing, elected as he seemed to be the one to address her first. "I suppose that's a fair assumption. Just as well, we've heard you're one of the few honorable dragons reputed to be out there."

Almost mollified, their visitor nodded tersely. "Honorable by \_joor\_ standards, yes. There are not many of us."

"But you're the one who bid to come to Whiterun, of your own initiative, for no other alledged reason than to 'befriend' its people. You understand why many have a hard time believing this?"

"I'd be a fool did I not. I threw myself at the mercy of \_Do\_-Dragonsreach's guards."

"Without warning, as I recall," Aela quipped.

"I could see no other way. Bearing recent events in mind, I knew your kind's disposition to strike first and ask questions later. But as I thought, they relented after realizing I meant no harm."

"So, why Dragonsreach?"

Resigned to explaining herself to the fullest measure, Reksadonviing let her words flow, "It's the seat of your hold's local government. I thought seeking a vote of amnesty there would have farther-reaching implications than if I were to call upon a village or farm, which could have easily been mistaken for an attack."

She paused to regard their silent, expectant faces, waiting for more, and sighed. "And, yes, knowledge of Odahviing's imprisonment here also factored into my plan."

"And you've caused quite a stir as a result."

The husky, wizened voice emanated from an opening door. Faster than Reksadonviing could blink, the five Companions were on their feet.

"Belay that, all of you. There's no need to be so formal."

While the others relented, sheepishly settling back into their seats, Skjor remained standing to make the elder man's introduction. "Kodlak Whitestone, our Harbinger."

"Guilty as charged." Unlike his fellows, Kodlak's voice was openly inviting and warm. He strode to the edge of the porch, appraising the not-everyday sight of a dovah lounging in Jorrvaskr's training yard. "This is quite the surprise you've brought us, Ria."

The imperial, hands in her lap, blushed a darker shade and nodded in acknowledgement.

Reksadonviing blinked and stared, unmoving, unsure of how to take this drastically-different reception. The semblance of his man to Paarthurnax was unnerving.

"Don't stop your questioning on account of me, Skjor," Kodlak went on. "Carry on."

"Are you not the Companions' leader?" Reksadonviing blurted, and immediately regretted her indiscreet choice of words. As one, the werewolves' chided looks turned venomous, and against the patter of falling rain, she was sure a growl came from one of them.

The eldest man, another bearer of the curse by the smell, shook his head. Only his expression remained free of fury. "Not in the traditional sense, dragon. I know not what kind of hierarchy the dov follow, but if you are still confused - yes? - the Circle presides over our ranks as warriors renowned for their greater ranges of experiences, not authority, and the role of Harbinger is to advise and manage so that those ranks do not fall into disarray."

"\_Vahzah?\_ Management without the imposition of one's authority? That's a fine line to avoid crossing."

"We all trust Kodlak as much as we trust each other. It's what the Companions are all about."

Kodlak's smile was like that of a proud grandfather, and he finally pulled up a chair. "And her earnestness is what makes people like Ria welcome to our fold."

"Recent judgement of what consistutes a 'good idea' notwithstanding," Skjor muttered, unpersuaded. "Like bringing a dragon to our doorstep on a whim, it sounds to me like you might be suffering from some delusions of grandeur there, whelp."

Ria's bright expression dimmed. "With respect, Skjor, all I saw at the time was someone in need of help, whether she knew it or not."

"So what are you proposing?" one of the unnamed warriors drawled. "That we let her \_join\_ us?"

Kodlak's grayed eyebrows rose. Reksadonviing's quills folded in dismay at the affirmative manner with which Ria glared at him.

He balked. "Shor, you're not serious?"

"You put it in words for her, Vilkas," the Harbinger remarked.

"It's not... unheard of," Aela admitted, finally looking less stoic and more contemplative. "The red dragon, some say he entered into a similar pact. In exchange for his freedom, he'd serve the Dragonborn upon Alduin's defeat."

"Which did come to pass," Reksadonviing went on, seeing no point in denying it. "And is my primary basis for believing such arrangements are possible to be reached with \_Jul\_ - mortalkind. I desire no consequential fame, but if my name is to have any place in history, I'd rather it be written in tomes separate from those detailing the atrocities committed by my birth race."

"And that's as honorable a goal as any I can think of," Ria finished, beaming once again.

Vilkas shook his head. "A dragon Companion. It's never been done."

"An honorary Companion," Kodlak clarified. "Until further notice."

"I don't like it," Skjor spoke up. He was leaning back in his chair now, arms crossed. "Never mind that she's split from their ranks. She's given up one cause without much thought, and with it, all credibility. How easy would that make it for her to betray us, and Whiterun?"

Reksadonviing's green eyes narrowed. Who was this man to think she had not thought her decision through?

"If you mean to slay me as a coward would and be done with the matter, I'm right here."

Skjor's eyes, blinded and not, lit with anger, and he sat up. "Excuse

me?"

"I never followed a cause per my own choice, \_joor\_. I was hatched in the Second Era, long after the reign of my kind had ended. I remember little of that time, but know I outlived all of my clutch-sisters, and I was never properly christened. Somehow, I fell before I was old enough for any drake to claim me as a mate, and my remains were somehow deemed worth of entombment by the \_Dovah Zaag\_. I owed Alduin for my resurrection, but with his defeat, there is no way to repay it. I am now honor-bound to no one but myself. I have no quarrel with this city, and therefore no want to conquer it."

The man seated beside Vilkas, burly arms resting on the table, tilted his head like an inquisitive wolf. "Good point. What point is there in backstabbing someone when it can't get you anywhere?"

"Attribute it to force of habit, Farkas," Skjor harrumphed. "Dragons have only ever existed for one thing - domination. I don't care what she claims. By blood, she has it in her to be as ruthless as any of them."

"Would you rather recite outdated rhetoric like your forefathers, or break new ground?" Reksadonviing demanded.

"Simply because a few of you have gone rogue by current dragon standards does not invalidate history and absolve you of your crimes."

"So you would judge me only on the short-sightedness of my peers?"

"That's not how we do things," Ria interjected, as if one of them were in need of a reminder.

Reksadonviing slowly rose onto her forelimbs and leaned forward, crouching over the stairs to stare down at the group before her. Rivulets of water streamed down the scales of her face to drip off her smooth chin. "I came here at the invitation of one of your own, promising me a chance to prove my good intentions. I did not agree to be ridiculed for having nothing to show yet. If you can't bring yourself to rise past old prejudices for the sake of one dovah who has committed no such crimes against Man or Mer, I'll take my leave."

Another hushed moment of wordless deliberation passed before Skjor averted his defiant gaze. The remaining Circle Members glanced between themselves, their unease plain.

Kodlak's gaze was distant as he pondered the dovah's words. Reksadonviing couldn't bring herself to glare at him, but she felt how his eyes seemed to linger on the fresh scars littering her still-healing face and neck. The open holes in her once-solid wingfolds let cold seep in worse than before, and already her claws were deeply stained with the dark dirt of her unorthodox den.

"How are you in battle?"

She drew back, looking aside in thought as if a response were to be found there. How would the truth affect the impression she was making?

"Largely untested. I know the instinctual fighting ways of my kind, that which we need to hunt. But if you're referring to my \_su'um\_ - voice - it does afford me the same power it does greater dov."

"How so?"

Reksadonviing curled her claws and spoke tightly. "My bloodline is not a gifted one, tainted in its time by starvation and long-reaching curses. We cannot shout with the same natural ease of our fellows. Other dov know it. They deem my type \_joor sos \_- those of mortal blood."

"They consider you a disgrace for this?"

She bristled. "I conduct myself a different way than they have, because my will to survive commands me to. I am considered weak because I am not the same as what they know. I went my own way for this reason, knowing I could not fit into whatever society Paarthurnax will attempt to rebuild. Reformed or not, he is still Alduin's brother. There are those who would resist the changes he wishes to enact, who would not tolerate me, and perhaps one day I will return if he ever achieves converting those traditionalists, leading the dov into a new era of peace." She paused, drawing a tense breath, and looked to Kodlak. "I eagerly await that day. But in the meantime, I'll do what I can here to help foster that ideal."

"Pretty speech, dragon," Skjor remarked. He still didn't appear convinced, but the condescending edge was gone from his voice. "Pray tell, what would forging peace have to do with a guild of warriors?"

Reksadonviing exhaled through her nose, reminding herself to stay calm, and her words Tamrielic. "You are people of action. Were I to think it'd help, I'd gladly retire to some distant mountaintop, hoping and meditating for the rest of my days. But I don't think it would help change jul attitudes toward the dov very quickly. Paarthurnax and the Greybeards are case in point."

Kodlak nodded. "The question we're all skirting around still stands, though: were the Companions called upon, could you bring yourself to battle another dragon?"

"How many of you have faced us in combat?" Reksadonviing deadpanned the question. "And be honest."

Ria and four of the werewolves looked to the one of their number who glanced away as if shamed.

"Farkas," Aela prompted, gently. "We've all heard it before."

Eventually, he found the courage to recount the event. "Once, outside of Morthal. Talking terms with this contact when it showed up outta nowhere."

"Were you victorious?"

He scratched a fingernail across an invisible flaw on the table's

surface. "Client was killed, and the dragon got away."

"\_Kusah\_, interesting..." Reksadonviing blinked as the realization dawned on her. "Then... the Companions are not \_dovahkriid\_ - dragonslayers?"

"Not yet," Skjor amended, and he sounded neither disappointed nor eager to challenge the assessment. "Usually by the time word reaches us and we get a response sent to the location, dragon's long gone and the damage done. Sellwords tend to claim any of the ones that pick territory long enough for a jarl to put a bounty on, so that's ruled our involvement out."

"It doesn't mean the possibility won't arise," Vilkas pointed out. His cool, gray stare was the complete opposite of his brother's meek, embarrassed gaze. "If any of this comes to pass, you'd be our greatest asset. But before that, we would need to know you can be trusted, without question."

"And achieving that trust would entail what?" Reksadonviing asked, glancing sidelong at Ria.

"Most whelps are sent on errands or given minor jobs at first," the imperial explained. "But in your case, some flexibility would be needed."

"A lot, she means," Skjor corrected. "Not all of our clients would be as thrilled to meet a dragon as Ria here."

"I gathered that much," Reksadonviing grumbled, and paused to think the arrangement over. Her spaded tailtip flicked against the ground. "Whelps work alone?"

"Typically."

The dovah leaned in again to nudge the imperial's shoulder with her nose. "So why not let the \_ko\_- Ria supervise me?"

"Because she's not much more than a whelp herself," Aela summarized. "I'm sorry, sister. But missions of the magnitude this dragon would be bound to undertake - "

"Would be better completed were I to work with someone I have a modicum of trust for."

"Of course they would," Kodlak said, not unkindly. He stood. "Which now leaves the matter up for discussion among the Circle, privately. As you can imagine, we'll need time to consider the stakes."

From the set of her jaw, it was clear Ria did not care for the declaration. But there was nothing she could do besides bow her head: "Yes, Harbinger."

"How much time?" Reksadonviing asked, despite knowing the answer.

Kodlak surprised her when he reached forward. His fingers brushed the black quills at her jowls while his palm settled on her cheek. Reksadonviing thought she would have flinched, but the old nord's gaze was earnest.

"Only as much as we need, I promise. We won't leave you in suspense."

The calmness with which he spoke was comforting. Beyond the cold sheen of rain, his hand was warm.

She tilted her head ever so slightly sideways, leaning into it. "Very well, Zeymahzin. I will await your word."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Notes:<strong> I know. A lotta talkin' and not much action in this entry.

But I made up my mind: I've decided to write the Companions as they are pre-Dovahkiin. Because I do like Kodlak and Skjor. So here you have the longest chapter I've yet written for the story (albeit not by much), which is part recap, part introduction. All of which effectively renders "Forge" as AU, even by Skyrim standards.

Me likes. Hope you did, too. :3

But I will reiterate now: this story is still open to suggestions for filler chapters regarding Reksha's interactions with other Whiterun residents. Feel free to review or PM ideas you'd like to see explored.

Dov terms/phrases:

><em>Duziir jul. Zu'u los nid geinro rez.<em> - Insolent man. I am no one's pet.

><em>joor<em> - mortal

><em>kon<em> - girl

><em>mungrohiik<em> - werewolf

><em>su'um<em> - voice

><em>vahzah<em> - true (used in lieu of "really")

><em>zaymahzen<em> - companion

## 9. Test

**\*\*Disclaimer:\*\*** Skyrim and all its canon content are the property of Bethesda Game Studios. No infringement is intended.

Reksadonviing and any unrecognizable names are characters of my own devising.

**\*\*Notes:\*\*** Fav/alert thanks to alucardgal.

Filler chapter, I guess. Brought to you by the discovery that "snowberry" can be used to refer to anyone hailing from Winterhold. XD

\* \* \*

><p>Reksadonviing didn't think she would be anxious to hear back from the Circle. With a brief farewell, she had climbed back over the city wall and taken off without much ado. She circled in the rainclouds long enough to watch the group disappear into the mead hall. From



there, she circled around behind the bluff, bypassing Dragonsreach in plain sight, before descending to land beside her den.<p>

It was as she had left it - damp and smelly. The mutilated carcass of a mammoth calf lay rotting at the den's threshold, which she swept aside before delving down into the hollow. There, she curled up in the cold, dark space and waited. Sleep did not come easy, as it turned out. So she waited with ears and eyes open.

For the next several hours, the only sounds to be heard were the patter of thick raindrops, and her own breaths echoing off the rock overhead. Stomach knotted with restlessness, Reksadonviing half-expected to hear the telltale clatter of armor outside, hoofbeats of approaching horses. But nothing came.

This was what she had wanted, to make a true inroad with some of the folk of Whiterun. Who those folk were mattered not, so long as their notions were honorable and similar enough to hers. There was no taking it back now, and she would not rush them to hurry in their deliberations.

How did the saying go - "it is always wise to mistrust a dovah"?

Besides prideful and overbearing, their kind were inherently prone to changes of fancy. Years of lordship over the so-called lesser races had imbued them with that mindset. Reksadonviing didn't always trust herself, so it was no mystery to her why convincing the Circle of her benevolent intentions would be a long, arduous process.

The ominously-steady rain tapered off by sunrise. Though she only found a few minutes of rest with eyes closed, the gray dovah climbed back above ground, shook off the worst of the mud clinging to her scales, and took flight. The fresh scents of the afterstorm breeze cleared her senses, and she circled the several times, climbing higher with each spiral.

Within the privacy the sky offered, she mused on the less-savory aspects of her newfound allies. \_Mungrohiik\_- werewolves. She had heard the stories of those mortals afflicted by the Daedric lord Hircine, and the only common trait seemed to be how inherently different each story was from the next. Some took to the beastblood with zeal, while others could think of nothing more than to how to cleanse their souls of it. Another common denominator were all the innocent bystanders who were figuratively and sometimes literally chewed up by these individuals.

How was it such a carefully-molded warrior guild was led by a pack of them?

Reksadonviing spun wing-over-wing, shaking the thoughts from her head with a mindless growl. What did it matter? A chance by their right was better than no chance at all.

Ria did not seem to know, or if she did, she did not let it factor into how they perceived her. Perhaps the imperial's behavior would be the best model for the dovah to follow when present among any of the Circle.

With her appetite for flight sated, Reksadonviing dove and circled

the bluff again. Smoke from the pitfires mingled in her nose along with the everyday smells of waste, leather, and metal. The townsfolk were out early, inspecting their homes and businesses for any damage the rains might have dealt. Few turned to glance up at the spikey silhouette of their newest resident gliding by overhead.

The sun dried up all but the deepest puddles littering the ground. Reksadonviing spotted what few children there were among the crowds, still clad in their cotton sleepwear, running from district to district, making a kind of splash-tag game of the pools. Their antics reminded her of the grime between her own scales, and the pressing need of a wash.

She landed by the farms south of the bluff and along the eastward road, where the runoff was deeper and moved fast enough to be used for cleaning. With a messy splash that sent the slaughterfish fleeing for their lives, she waded in and turned to face the current. White froth broke against her scales and wingfolds, seeking places to run off the craggy surfaces, taking encrusted bits of dirt and grass sod along for the ride.

Reksadonviing dipped her face into the river several times, mouth open, biting at invisible targets to work out whatever bits of leftover flesh or bone might be stuck in her teeth. With her thumbclaws she pried lingering bits of bone marrow from the roots of her fangs. The Circle had been kind not to point it out yesterday, but in retrospect, she was sure she had fit Athis' first description of a smelly, unruly dovah.

Preoccupied as she was, the arrow that glanced harmlessly off her brow caused a flinch. She lurched too far and fell sideways on the smooth stones at the riverbottom, catching herself with an awkward splash that sent water running up her nostrils. Surfacing, the snarl on her lips died upon spying who it was that smirked at the waterlogged dovah from the elevated bank.

"\_Ruth nii\_. Must you do that every time we meet?"

Unperturbed, Aela casually slung her hunting bow across her back. "I've already been standing here a few minutes. Nothing else seemed to get your attention."

Climbing out onto the bank opposite from the huntress, Reksadonviing shook off the water still dripping from her face, quills, and horns. "I assume you're here with news?"

"You could say that. As Kodlak claimed, we didn't keep you in suspense. Here was the nearest place you were said to be by those in the Plains District."

Wings ruffled, Reksadonviing lashed her tail and stood higher, glancing around. She frowned in bemusement. "Is it only you here?"

"You might call it your first trust test. If you are as you claim, there would be no need for any of the Companions to face you with a shield-sibling at their side."

"Is that to say I am one of your guild now?"

"In time." Nonplussed, Aela nimbly hopped across a stretch of exposed rocks that spanned the river's width. Without hesitation, she strode up to stand before her guild's petitioner. "We'll have to adapt our training regimen accordingly to make sure you're fit to be a called ally. But for now, yes, you have made your case for an opportunity to prove your worth."

Words failed her momentarily, but Reksadonviing finally coughed a response, head dipped in a bow, "\_Zu'u nox hi\_. I thank you."

Aela scoffed softly, hands on her hips, but the smirk never faded. She shook her head, red hair waving gently in the breeze. "Sentimentality. Now I know you're not the usual kind of dragon."

"What of the others? Do they feel the same?"

"They'll tell you for themselves soon enough. I'd be lying if I said there wasn't any lingering dissention among us, but by and large, they can agree that because no one was roasted alive, you must already hold us in some esteem."

Reksadonviing nodded, solemn. "The strategy is a necessary one. I must start somewhere the common people could identify with more than on an official level."

"Sentimental and smart," Aela's eyebrows went up, not in astonishment, nor in mockery. "No wonder you left Paarthurnax."

The dovah's gratification deflated and her quills flared, while her voice went flat. "Paarthurnax was not the problem. If anything, I'm here at his blessing."

Despite her confident exterior, Aela had the good grace to look a little shamed, a wolf with its ears pinned back. "My apologies. I didn't mean to infer anything negative. It's just, you can imagine only so many names stand out in reference to dragons, and his rivals Alduin's."

Reksadonviing nodded again, albeit little stiffly, and said nothing.

They stood silent for a moment, regarding each other not as enemies or equals, but not quite allies, either.

"Then... what next?"

Aela put a hand to her chin and paced. Crouched in the grass, Reksadonviing watched the huntress circle her. "Being what you are rules out conventional tests the whelps are put through, errand-running among them. Hazing will have to be kept to a minimum. No, to test how you do under stress we'll need something bigger, more spectacular. Agh." Aela stepped closer and ran a hand across the dovah's scaled muzzle, as if appraising how tough the natural coat of armor was. Reksadonviing's eye followed the hand, so delicate and soft compared to Eorlund's or Kodlak's. "What to do? So few things can rival a dragon in strength."

Reksadonviing said nothing, lest she upset the huntress' train of thought. Finally, Aela's eyes found Dragonsreach, seated high on the

hill. "The snowberry might know."

"\_Wo\_?"

"Farengar Secret-Fire. Balgruuf's court wizard. A Nord with more than a passing interest in your kind. Even before Alduin resurfaced he'd been known to send more than a few for-hire treasure hunters to their deaths in search of Dragon Cult artifacts." Aela pursed her lips, her hand still resting on the dovah's face. "That incident with Odahviing didn't get him anywhere closer to understanding anything, though we may have no choice here. He might be able to conjure up a few targets you can test your abilities on."

"You don't like this idea?"

"Short of finding a few trolls or giants for you to spar with, I can't think of anything else. I could ask Skjor or Vilkas, but they'd probably say the same."

This quandry, being discussed as uncertainly as it was, compelled Reksadonviing to mention the subject lurking at the back of her mind, "I would not ask any of your pack to face me." Aela glanced back at her, startled, and the dovah lowered her voice. "Yes, huntress, I know the smell of beastblood."

"How?"

"The same way you could tell any smells apart. Let us leave it at that, yes?"

Aela's questioning stare lingered for a long moment before she removed her hand and let fall to her side. "To Farengar, then?"

"You said yourself we have no choice."

"I wish I could say otherwise."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Notes:<strong> Readers can probably expect a few more short entries to come. I imagine each of the Companions, including the Circle, will get to spend their bonding time with Reksa. That is, before we get into whatever kind of plot this story is evolving toward having.

Dov terms/phrases:

><em>ruth nii<em> - damn it

><em>wo<em> - who

## 10. Fragment

**\*\*Disclaimer:\*\*** Skyrim and all its canon content are the property of Bethesda Game Studios. No infringement is intended.

Reksadonviing and any unrecognizable names are characters of my own devising.

**\*\*Notes:\*\*** Fav/alert thanks to LadyDragon1316 (as always, kudos for the continued reviews), MiddleDreamer00, and PhoenixVyxen.

Another filler chapter, in which Farengar gets his comeuppance for what he 'did' to Odahviing, so to speak.

\* \* \*

><p>Reksadonviing spat blood against the grand balcony's floor, certain she saw the white glimpse of a fractured fang shard hit the splattered stones, and snarled at her adversary again. The sound reverberated off the palace walls like rolling thunder.<p>

A walking hunk of ice wasn't supposed to be so tough. But, as the court wizard had been asked by Aela, it was the strongest opponent he could offer for the dovah to test her mettle against. Either the atronach was to be reduced to frosty splinters, or she was to concede defeat by fleeing from the balcony.

Aela's instructions to her were clear. No \_thu'ums\_ were to be used. This was a trial of physical prowess.

Balgruuf the Greater was not happy to discover Dragonsreach was being used for such a test, understandably so, without being consulted by his court wizard. But as the fight was already on, talking down an enraged dovah was out of the question by the time he was made aware. Now, as they had the first morning she turned up in Whiterun, a crowd of palace staff and guards had assembled to watch the ensuing skirmish.

In truth, the battle had not been on for very long. Reksadonviing had already borne the pain of several blunt-force strikes to her nose and jaw, but as the atronach stalked back and forth, looking for its next opening to attack, the dovah realized the new urgency behind finishing the trial. She hadn't met up with Aela at Dragonsreach in order to cause property damage.

"Again!" the purple-robed nord goaded from the sidelines.

Head lowered, the atronach charged. Reksadonviing lunged out to meet it, tilting her face down to use the ridged top of her skull like a shield. With a loud \_thunk\_ the atronach's raised arms thudded against her horns. Following through, she swung her neck sideways, tossing the icen entity aside like a discarded doll.

Three onlooking guards scurried out of the way as the atronach splayed against the stone wall. Chips of stone went flying with the impact. Shouts of alarm rang out as the gray dovah about-faced, spinning her tail like a whip to slam its spaded tip against her opponent. With a \_crack\_ the atronach's left arm broke off at the elbow, and it staggered down onto its knees.

The dismayed jarl took his chance to intervene. "Reksa, enough!"

Reksadonviing's frenzied drive fizzled and died abruptly at the sight of the blond nord standing between her and the atronach, arms raised. The growl in her throat died and she lowered her head, backing away with a few uneasy steps.

With her compliancy assured, Balgruuf glared over his fur-caped shoulder. "Farengar."

The underlying order need not be said, as the wizard obediently waved his hand to cancel the casted summons. The frost atronach vanished with a flash of spectral white snow.

Aela, for her part, looked torn between shock and embarrassment, like a disobedient child whose breach of the rules had been found out. The moment did not last long before she recomposed the confident mask and stepped forth, into the tentative space between the jarl and the dovah. "Jarl Balgruuf, please forgive the intrusion."

"Explain to me why any apology is needed at all, and I might consider it," the older nord glowered, hands now on his hips, stance askew. The bulk of his ire did not seem directed at her or his city's newest resident. Again, he glared at Farengar. "A third of that explanation includes you." Finally, he looked to the crouching Reksadonviing, pausing at the sight of her bloodied maw. "And you probably have the most explaining to do of all."

"We did not intend to cause such a scene, milord," Aela insisted. "It was the only way Farengar would agree to the terms."

"What \_terms\_?"

"A simple stress trial for the dragon to undertake," Farengar explained, stepping closer. He sounded not at all cowed, but the exact opposite - thrilled to have had a chance to participate. "To do so inside an enclosed space brought a more telling result than had this match been conducted beyond the city limits."

Balgruuf scowled at the spider-web cracks adorning the stone wall. "Pretend I understand why. You commence this test, never minding what damage is dealt to Dragonsreach, \_without\_ informing me?"

Reksadonviing's mouth throbbed, red still dripping from her chin, but she took a half step forward and spoke anyway. "If you must blame anyone, blame me, \_jun\_. I should never have gone along with it."

"Why did you feel you had to, Rekse?" Balgruuf's eyes flashed with anger. "You were said to be here on a mission of \_peace\_."

"Because I asked her to, milord," Aela blurted.

Silence fell upon the balcony.

"...What?"

"It was a mistake. But as the newest trainee, I had to find something - "

"Trainee?" Balgruuf interrupted, and slowly turned his head to look back at the battered dovah. The anger evaporated, replaced now with abject disbelief. "You, a member of the Companions?"

Her black quills folded. "Not yet, milord. I was told this is the first step toward becoming an honorary bearer of that title, though."

"But for a creature of her standing, I admit, I expected more," Farengar sniffed, arms folding. "The time it took for you to adapt to the atronach's strategy before it had landed several blows, that could have cost you dearly, were the adversary you faced any tougher."

"It was only her first test, Secret-Fire," Aela pointed out, not defensively, but with clear emphasis. "Were her lack of battle sense not in question, we would not have even had need to seek your assistance."

"In question? She successfully dispatched the smugglers as asked in order to claim her den," Balgruuf commented.

"Common criminals, milord. For her, the bar is set considerably higher if she is to be thought of as part of Jorrvaskr."

"Indeed. If there is any further assistance I can provide," Farengar glanced around. Reksadonviing followed the man's gaze until they both spotted the same tooth fragment, glinting ivory white on the bloodied floor. With a stoop, he snatched it up, gingerly wiping away the red with a folded edge of robe. "Ah! Do not hesitate to call on me."

Aela shook her head. "With respect, I don't think there's much else you can help us achieve. Besides conjure stronger targets."

"Outside of Dragonsreach," Balgruuf stressed, hand kneading his brow as if he were suffering a headache.

"Perhaps the dragon might remain on the balcony for a time? I have other experiments that might - "

"Farengar!" Balgruuf barked, and the mage fell meekly silent. Sternly, the jarl pointed upward. "Have you already forgotten what happened last time you thought that a good idea?"

Reksadonviing looked up, noticing for the first time the blackened stones adorning the arcway above their heads. The charring pattern was typical of fire. She felt a little twinge at the reminder of Odahviing, but it was quickly overcome by a sweeping sense of ire. Whatever had transpired here, involving her once-consort and the court wizard, it clearly hadn't been on amiable terms.

Eyes narrowing, she took a full step closer. With a rough nudge of her nose, she pushed Farengar forward, taking some satisfaction in seeing him stumble and splutter. Still, his argument persisted, and he waved the tooth fragment around as though in illustration. "Think of it, though - what a sample of dragon blood could do to bolster alchemic creations? To fortify weaponry and armor? Consider it one of the sacrifices she must make in order to - "

"Fus!"

Reksadonviing might as well have coughed, for it was uttered as gently as she could. The soft gust of wind, borne of a thu'um's root word, ruffled the hair and clothing of the nords assembled before her. Dust kicked from the stones wafted into the air, pelting the unwary guards who still stood too close. Farengar clutched at his

robe's hood, startled as though afraid it would be blown off, and turned to look up at the annoyed, quills-flared countenance glaring down at him.

"I advise you drop the subject, \_odogah\_. As my... trainer, Aela's word outranks mine. If she says our business is concluded, it is \_so\_." Reksadonviing thumped the floor with her tailtip. Blood still leaked down the side of her jaw. "Allow me to choose, for it was the luxury you clearly did not offer Odahviing, and I might be inclined to let you experiment some other day."

The wizard stood with his nose in the air, cheeks reddening. "And if you say no?"

"We will reach another bargain, for I am not unreasonable. You know you can only glean so much from dusty artifacts and old, intranslatable books. Even my limited knowledge of current dov affairs trumps your understanding by centuries. I offer you that, in exchange for your time and efforts whenever Aela may feel we need to call upon them."

The wizard mutely looked to his kinsmen for help.

Balgruuf, arms crossed, shook his head.

Aela stood with a fist propped on one hip, an eyebrow raised to match.

Faced with this impasse, Farengar took a final look at the fragment in his hand and stalked off.

"Hmph. Make sure you don't forget what you claim to know in the meantime."

Unceremoniously, the tooth fragment was dropped to the floor, counterpointing the \_slam\_ of the closing balcony doors.

Aela knelt to retrieve it, and walked back, balancing the fragment on her palm.

But her next most-pressing question was oddly irrelevant.

"What was that word you called him... oh-doooh-gah?"

Reksadonviing smirked, revealing her chipped fang. "Snowberry."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Notes:<strong> Put in his place, he is.

I know not why Farengar has such a sense of self-importance, besides the fact he's the most experienced magic user in all of Whiterun. Dunno if I like or dislike him for it, but I always get a smile out of seeing how his 'experiment' on Odahviing startles him into sprinting away.

Dov terms/phrases:

><em>fus<em> - force (recognize this one?)

><em>jun<em> - jarl

><em>odogah<em> - snowberry



## 11. Rights

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**\*\*Notes:\*\*** Fav/alert thanks to DragonsDeadandDancing.

Shortest chapter yet. But I just thought of something - until I lay out a proper plot for this story, don't all the upcoming chapters count as filler until otherwise stated? o-0

\* \* \*

><p>The blugeoning by the atronach called for another wash, however slight. At Aela's suggestion, Reksadonviing visited Jorrvaskr's training yard once more. She sat up on her haunches to brace her thumbclaws along the wall's edge.<p>

It was not the huntress who rendezvoused with her there. Craning her head over the wall, the dovah spotted only Ria standing atop the stairs, with a filled waterskin in one hand and a very-tattered rag draped over her shoulder. One glimpse of her friend's bloodied mouth caused the imperial to pale. But without asking the cause, she wetted the rag and stepped forward.

Reksadonviing explained in stages while Ria worked, careful to stay her words whenever the young woman's hands wandered too close to her sharp teeth. Already the city was abuzz with new chatter related to their dov resident, and Ria was keen to sort fact from fiction. Eventually, Farengar became the subject of conversation, as did discerning exactly why Reksadonviing had 'treated' him so 'poorly'. Besides the hands-on experience, he wasn't even going to be paid for the job, in gold or in equally-valueable goods.

Anyone claiming to know as much as Farengar claimed to had to know of certain dov formalities. Why did he give up the tooth fragment?

"You're saying, he didn't deserve a reward, because Balgruuf called the fight off before there was a clear victor?" Ria deduced.

Reksadonviing, trying not to flinch at the feeling of cloth and fingers prying into the gaps between the scales of her face, curled her lip as if to snarl. Her tone remained as casual as ever, belaying the expression of distaste. "Effectively. I would not allow him that prize if it meant I would further demean myself, not if it entailed subjecting myself to his every whim. Like the old priests of the Dovah Zaag, the gifts bestowed on them by ruling drakes were honors earned, not given overnight."

"Makes sense. But you still left the door open, should his assistance be needed in the future?"

"Correct."

"Can't imagine he was too happy about that."

"\_Nid\_. It's a fair arrangement for the wrongs he has committed. Odahviing could not have been gone for all those weeks without that wizard using him for only a single test."

"Sounds to me like you had more than a passing interest in exacting that particular bit of restitution. You've been otherwise pleasant to everyone else."

"Odahviing is one of the few dov who have shown me kindness, rather than stigmatize me for it. I felt obligated to repay him in some small way. May we leave it at that?"

Ria shrugged, scrubbing with new vigor at the trail of dried, flaky blood that coated the underside of the gray dovah's jaw. "I'm sorry. It probably wasn't my place to say something."

Reksadonviing's eyes, recessed as they were under armored brows, took a hooded look as she glanced away and waited for the cleaning to finish. She was hardly in the mood to explain what constituted romance among the dov. Something else had to be brought up. "Think not of it. Technically, it is your right. Even you outrank me, \_kon\_."

"You think you could start to refer to me by my name, then?"

"I take it back. You don't outrank me by \_that\_ much." Reksadonviing grinned mischevously at the sodden rag that was slapped her nose in playful retaliation.

"Getting along famously, you two."

A dour voice intruded from the shadows of the porch. The smirk dropped from Ria's face, but she did not frown, rather simply turned to look.

Quills flaring, Reksadonviing tilted her head up, instantly recognizing the gangly warrior leaning against the porch's central supporting post. "Athis."

"Pleasure to see you again, dragon. Or should I say, 'sister'?"

"Pft. You sound genuinely insincere in how you use that term, \_fahliil\_."

"You got that right." Nonplussed, Athis strode forward. "Ria, humor me a moment. You know I was gone for a few days on that job in Falkreath? Got back last night, fell into bed, none the wiser. Imagine what a surprise when it is Torvar - of all people - who wakes me up to say the Circle has given a dragon the go-ahead to try and join the Companions. I tell him he's been lollygaggin' at the meadery a smidge too long, maybe with a dash of skooma on the side, fall back asleep. Wake up later, and discover the whole of Whiterun is saying the \_same\_ thing?"

"This upsets you?" the imperial deadpanned.

"Oh, no. What upsets me to know is that Torvar, for once, wasn't talkin' out of his tankard." The dunmer's challenging glare turned up to meet the dovah's. The air, already hot and stuffy with lingering humidity, seemed to swell with tension. "So that begs the inevitable question, \_Reksa\_, is it true?"

"Yes."

"By Azura's good graces!" Athis clapped a hand to his forehead as if pained, eyes clamping shut. With a thump, Jorrvaskr's back door swung open, punctuating his exclamation. "The bloody world \_has\_ gone mad."

"Don't despair. Nothing's final as of yet, brother." With a suddenness typical of her always-stealthy entrances, Aela emerged from the hall. Like Kodlak, she looked down on the three 'whelps' as if a dovah among them were already an everyday sight. "I admit to having had reservations, and adapting won't be without its difficulties. But Reksadonviing has done none of us any wrong."

"Doesn't mean she can't or won't," Athis objected.

"Would an announcement at dinner have made the idea sound any better to you?" Aela tilted her head. "The Circle has spoken, Athis. We aim to allow her a fair try."

"After deliberating a whole five minutes?" he grumbled. "It's foolishness. Dragons never did anyone but themselves any good."

"I aim to change that perception," Reksadonviing spoke up, head still craned over the wall, at eye level with the two warriors. "It does not surprise if you don't believe me, but know I've only been at it a few days yet."

"That makes you the new whelp among us? Great, bloody great."

Aela strode down the steps. "You can bemoan the decision all you want. I don't see why you find it so hard to believe, but no one's asked for your direct involvement, either. In the meantime, I suggest you try to live with it."

In an uncanny imitation of Farengar, Athis cursed under his breath and he stalked away from the training yard. "Learn to live with a \_dragon\_..."

Aela watched him depart. Only once he disappeared around the hall's north wing did she speak. "And there I thought Vilkas would prove to be a real stick in the mud."

"Athis takes his reputation seriously," Ria explained to the bemused-looking Reksadonviing. "Besides Vignar, he's the most experienced warrior to call Jorrvaskr home who isn't one of the Circle."

"He thinks my presence here will somehow reflect negatively unto him?" the dovah asked.

"It will all of us, to some extent," Aela remarked. At the pair of startled looks these words received, she rolled her eyes, wordlessly

taking the bloodied rag from Ria's grip. Flipping the cleaner side up, she swept it over the freshly-grown scales along Reksadonviing's muzzle with soft, tender strokes. "I mean, until we have tangible proof you can be trusted, Rekse, we will all have to suffer those who doubt. The Companions' legacy is thousands of years old, reshaped time and again, and by no means perfect. All of this only counts as a little bump in the road thus far. You'll yet find your place here."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Notes:<strong> I know. Short, right? But at least it sets up another bit of mystery. Why does Athis have such a grudge against dragons?

And... it's weird. Working on this story has proven to be just as addictive as playing Skyrim itself. :s Which is why I'll relent and take a few days off now to come up with a nice, meaty chapter to read next. Bear with me until then please. Should be twice as long as these entries if all goes well. :)

Dov terms/phrases:

><em>Dovah Zaag<em> - the Dragon Cult  
><em>fahliil<em> - elf  
><em>kon<em> - girl  
><em>nid<em> - no

## 12. Faith

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**\*\*Notes:\*\*** Fav/alert thanks to Eclair, KKK NOT TODAY, LordProtector95, marauderlic13, PineappleAnanas, and Tadrith.

Shoutouts:

>To "guest": the translation didn't quite pan out. But I will say this - <em>"Nox hi" :D<em>

>To "Fortunate Son": I appreciate the critique, helps keep the ego from overinflating and leading my muse astray. No, Rekse isn't made of the toughest stuff. I'm thinking that, later on, more of her backstory will come out to explain those weaknesses, probably via flashback. The tricky thing right now is figuring out how to tie the two tenses together in a believable fashion. Thanks again.  
><p>

Like pictures? I worked on my first proper bit of Rekse art, too. Visit my profile to find the link to my deviantART gallery, where it can be found. There are a few minor changes that make set her apart from a typical frost dragon.

Okay. So here's the big, not-too-drawn-out chapter that I promised. Hope it doesn't disappoint.

\* \* \*

><p>"Again."<p>

Finding Eorlund absent at his place of work, Reksadonviing lay around the stones in front of the Skyforge, head resting on her folded wings, with her knees folded up against her stomach and tail draped across her spurred heels. She roosted on the ledge overlooking the training yard, and from that perch, she almost savored the warmth of the forge at her back. It was more welcome than the reception her friend was presently being dealt. But it had been made clear the dovah wasn't to interfere in this training session. To merely observe was her challenge here.

Motionless, save for the quirk of her green eyes, Reksadonviing watched as Ria sighed, climbed back to her feet, and brushed herself off for the sixth time. Her resilience belied the otherwise-frail impression her slim build and light armor conveyed. Per her trainer's command, she staggered her stance, the sparring sword she had been afforded held between carefully-spaced hands. A fine coat of dirt had already sullied her leather vestments, testifying to the many falls she had taken.

Her trainer, with his steel armor still as immaculate as it had been rendered upon its last cleaning, mirrored the posture, and again they lunged forward to spar anew.

Reksadonviing sniffed, sampling the hot summer air, and exhaled to herself, a slight puff of smoke wafting from her nostrils. She was not bored, merely... daydreaming. This wasn't the first time she had been witness to a 'thrashing'. It had been surprisingly difficult to hold herself back initially, to not step in and help Ria win her battle. Despite her beaming, steadfast personality, the woman still had a lot to learn when it came to armed combat.

But then, when she had stuck her nose into the matter, Reksadonviing did not wish to re-live the harsh thwack Farkas had dealt her chin with the back of his hand. It hadn't hurt, per se, but along with his poignant glare, the surly warrior's rebuke of "I meant back off and watch" couldn't have been more clear.

Two weeks with the Companions had already yielded a variety of notable, if not always flattering, situations for her to find herself in.

Tilma, the withered in-house maid, was understandably perturbed when asked if she wished to meet the new recruit. Made aware of the impending introduction, Reksadonviing went to great pains to make herself presentable, including several washes. Only the unanticipated intrusion of a bear at the river, and the resulting fight which ended in lacerations and broken scales. Afraid to excuse herself, Reksadonviing had turned up for the occasion with a bloody mess of a face. The poor woman had fainted outright.

Torvar, the perpetual drunk he seemed to be, only seemed to cling to the fold through roughing up troublesome locals and telling the occasional raunchy story that left those of Jorrvaskr either in horrified speechlessness or rolling upon the ground with laughter. The other Companions must have considered him a kind of loveable lout to let him stay so long. Reksadonviing found him amiable enough, though she was still unsure if he even counted her as real or a

figment of overstimulated imagination. The few 'conversations' they engaged in typically ended in more confusion for her as perhaps learning the ways of the nords from him was not the most credible source.

Athis still loathed the sight of her. The elf's sullen glances and stiff, forced greetings were obvious enough. The reasons for them were not. His act persisted from day to day, and even the more seasoned Companions seemed to wonder at his persistent hostility. Cognizant of her rank, Reksadonviing never asked them to inquire on her behalf, but she had overheard more than a few tense words being exchanged whenever they sought Athis to ask for themselves.

Those same two warriors now watched Ria train from their place of 'resplendence' on the shaded porch, talking between swigs of water and bites of meat and bread. Reksadonviing was careful to avoid looking at them too long. Her quills quirked up again as Ria took a tumble and hit the ground with a soft "oof". Falling from her grasp, the flat of her sword clattered against the well-worn stones.

Farkas, once the imperial had stubbornly stood up again, sighed and shook his head. "You're still mucking up your footwork."

Ria knealt to retrieve her sword. She rolled her shoulders and stretched briefly before turning back to her trainer, pulling a loose strand of hair out of her eyes to tuck behind her ear. "You waited until after I took all that punishment to point that out?"

If he was taken aback by her acrid response, the nord didn't show it. "When were you planning on fixing it?" he shot back.

"After as many tries as it takes."

"You should probably tend to that cut first."

The motion of her head suggested Ria indulged an eye roll before muttering a few words. With her free hand, she summoned the restoration spell needed to apply to her badly-skinned left elbow.

"That's not your doing, is it?"

Reksadonviing's half-closed eyes perked open at the voice behind her. But she knew by sound and scent who it was. He was one of Jorrvaskr's select few who only spoke to her on an absolute needs-must basis.

"What, Vilkas?"

"Her sudden development of an \_attitude\_."

Reluctantly, Reksadonviing lifted her head and twisted her neck around to look at him across her dorsal spines. "Depends, \_joor\_. Does that make you pleased or displeased?"

He scowled, one eyebrow arched. "That depends on you."

The back and forth game, was it?

"Call it a fringe benefit of spending too much time around a dovah."

"Even if that dragon is a comparative weakling?" Receiving nothing but a deadpan stare in reply, Vilkas looked the dovah over, all shiny scales and healed wounds, lounging as she was in a suspicious state of inactivity. "Your own... training has not been going so well, either?"

\_You mean, lack of?\_

Reksadonviing snorted again, smoke billowing out like the exhaust from a bellows. Her eyes dropped to the ground, and she made up her mind to explain to the laconic twin. "Hrmph. Not to criticize, but I get the impression that no one around here knows exactly what I'm best suited to yet. Aela has tried her best, but there are only so many bear dens within a day's walking distance of the city. Kodlak and Skjor rarely leave the hall. I know better than to pull them away from business, as Athis alleges my presence here is what has caused it to dwindle off as of late." Her tail twitched from base down to spaded tip, the dovah's equivalent of a shrug. "Thus, here I am."

"You're free to come and go as you please."

"Go and never come back, you mean?" she challenged, chin thrust out with indignation. "\_Vorlaav\_ - dissenters. I know full well not all of you welcome my company."

Having faced his fair share of predators in the wild, Vilkas hardly batted an eye to the toothy visage that was suddenly so much closer to his face. His arms remained folded, tone placid as a frozen lake. "Then you must know so far it's been nothing but an expense without receiving much in return."

The gray dovah almost drew back, feeling a crick forming midway along her twisted neck. She knew Vilkas wasn't said to be a small talker, but one of his weaknesses was the inability to resist a debate. As long as he was talking, she would learn what she could. "According to you. A little mistrust, I expected. \_Tol las gurnen\_. It is the greater degree of exclusion some of your number engage in that baffles me."

"If you mean Athis, typical fear of the unknown can explain a lot of that. No dragons hail from Morrowind. And for dragons, all that's known of your kind comes from written word and word of mouth, more than personal experience."

"Owing to those fears, shouldn't the fact I have not yet eaten anyone be proof enough of my good intentions?"

"Going against the grain, you're fighting an uphill battle. They're never that simple."

Reksadonviing flicked her tailtip again, pretending to consider the words. "To leave Whiterun would be the easy way out. As I've learned, easy has no place in becoming a Companion. Have you any guidance for me beyond that, \_zeymah\_?" At the icy, if confused, glare he levelled, she translated: "Brother?"

By the ensuing silence, it seemed as though he actually gave the question a moment's devout thought. Reksadonviing reminded herself not to sigh or pull any faces. Unlike most of his associates, Vilkas was a tricky man to read. She had already pegged him as a dissenter, still probably kicking himself for ever suggesting a dovah be admitted to their ranks, still seething over the idea his associates and immediate superiors somehow thought it a good idea.

"None suited to your particular needs, I'm afraid. But I did have a... question."

That explained the hesitation. Still, she didn't know whether to feel smug or disappointed.

"Yes?"

The doors to Jorrvaskr thumped open, and shut again. Torvar and Athis and the utensils of their lunch were gone inside. "Does the name... Nahfahlaar mean anything to you?"

Reksadonviing glanced aside and wracked her memories, old and new, for an answer, but to no avail. "No. Why?"

"Because it would seem you're not the first dragon in history to broker peace with other races," Vilkas recited, speaking from memory as he apparently was. "According to the one atlas I could find, Nahfahlaar was a dragon repeatedly aligned himself with Wayrest, of High Rock, in the Second Era. Are you sure that you bear no relation to him?"

She shook her head again, quills mantling. "\_Nid\_. None that I can recall. Just as I'm sure you have things you'd forgotten if told to you in your childhood, as do I."

"Granted, it was an incomplete record."

"Did this tome mention his fate?"

"Unknown, presumed at large. The data logged comprised all the Blades knew of dragons, recently killed or alive, at the time."

"\_Tuz\_." Reksadonviing muttered the name like a curse. She feigned offense, quills flaring. In truth, she was hardly sensitive on the matter. The Blades were merely the first iteration of all modern dragonslayers to emerge since Alduin and the beginning of the Dragon Crisis. Besides scholars, who else would be in the business of cataloguing the Dov?

"You've asked your question, \_grohiik\_. Was there anything else?"

Vilkas' eyebrows drew together. "What is a -  
"

"Omph!"

"Ha!"

Startled, Reksadonviing half-stood up on her forelimbs, twisting her head back to look down on the training yard. Also drawn by the



sounds, Vilkas stepped around the dovah's curled tail, took a look for himself, and sighed.

"She finally got you, then?"

Farkas shook dust from his hair as he struggled up to his feet, free arm braced across his midsection. He wheezed. "Yeah, \_finally\_."

"I still got you, though," Ria declared, triumphant, though she was breathing fast, the ferocity of the battle apparent in her eyes.

"Clearly. Which is more than can be said for our lame friend here," Vilkas pointed out, half glancing at the sullen look Reksadonviing shot him. She could not tell if he was being literal or sarcastic.

"\_Lig\_. You call me lame only because you folk cannot figure out what to do with me."

"Fair point. But to date, all you've impressed anyone with is what comes naturally to dragons: intimidation, fear, loathing - "

"So give her a \_job\_," Farkas interrupted his twin, gruff. From the burgeoning look of irritation she wore, Ria seemed inclined to agree. "That's the only way we're gonna know what she can or can't do."

"Short of take on another weakling dragon who won't knock her out of the sky with the first blow, what job \_can\_ we give her?" Vilkas objected.

Like siblings did, they bantered for a while. Reksadonviing ducked her head, nose wedging into her folded elbow, clamping her mouth shut lest she say something more out of line.

The remains of the broken tooth that hadn't yet fallen out still jutted from under her lip. Farengar's botched trial was ripe on everyone's minds. Far from solidify confidence, it had undermined the Companions' collective faith that their oversized whelp was suited for anything besides clearing out predatory nuisances.

Or so it seemed to her. Had Kodlak, their doting Harbinger, been consulted?

Her temper, the lurking omnipresent beast that it was, won out. "\_Gjok nii\_." Lashing her tail, Reksadonviing snarled, uncoiled herself and stood up. 'Fed up' only described so much of how she felt of being led around by the nose. "I'll find us a dovah, then. If nothing short of that will satisfy you - "

"No, hold on. We're not saying that, Reksa," Ria insisted, her alarm visible. "We just - "

Lividity alone fueled the dovah's rant. She leaned down to glare. "Don't mistake my tone, \_kon\_. I am grateful for the hospitality, yet all the same, hospitality is not what I'm here for. I intend to earn my share, but so long as that means waiting around with baited breath to hear the Circle says I can and cannot do, I might as well wait elsewhe- \_Rok!\_"

Gloved fingers closed around one of her jowl spines, and the sensitive nerves connected to them, and gave it a firm downward tug, eliciting the yelp. Reksadonviing yelped and cringed at the pinched sensation in her jaw, the sting so different from that of wounds inflicted by weapons.

Vilkas' grip was firm, his words low and decisive. "You realize how unbecoming these erratic moods make you out to be?" The dovah glared sideways at him, drew a terse breath, and held it. "I'll attribute it to nerves and going against your own inborn nature. But that only excuses so much. Your time will come, whelp. And until it does, you will wait, and you will not raise your voice to us again. Is that clear?"

The hold on her face wasn't painful, but it was precise, like his words. Reksadonviing spoke through gritted fangs, knowing how this must have appeared to the others, averting her eyes like a submissive omega. "Yes, zeymah."

"Good. If it helps for you to know," Vilkas went on, in a tone only slightly less full of ire than before. "Kodlak has been reviewing incoming requests for assistance, from all around Skyrim, with you in mind, when time has allowed. Once he finds the right job, you will be made aware of it."

"My faith in that promise only goes so far."

"Granted. But the absence of proof is what makes it a test of faith. Think on that while you wait."

The grip vanished, and Reksadonviing blinked again, the sting and wince vanishing. Slowly, she straightened up to sit on her heels, making a note to keep her face out of the nord's reach from now on. There was some truth to the advice. Despite how her presence upset the day-to-day lives of the Companions, they were still open to giving her a chance, so long as she didn't push her luck. And that would have to include keeping errant, impatient thoughts under better control.

"...Crime still persists in the hold?" she ventured, awkwardly. In the yard below, Ria and Farkas circled, readying themselves for another round of sparring.

"Rumor of your presence hasn't stopped it altogether, if that's what you mean."

"I didn't think it would. But... I guess what I mean to as is, is this all of you?"

Vilkas' eyes darkened with some genuine confusion.  
"Sorry?"

Reksadonviing sighed as she struggled to recall all the names. "You, Kodlak, Skjor, Ria, Farkas, Aela, Torvar, Athis, Eorlund, Tilma. Krosis." She paused to blink and reorient her thoughts. "Have I left anyone out?"

"If you're referring to the Companions and our associates, well... there is Njada. She was absent when you first called on Dragonsreach."

Our latest correspondence with her indicated she was to return from Markarth some time ago. And the Silver-Bloods already forwarded the gold. The job was done."

The silence which ensued was even more awkward, simmering like the coals of the Skyforge behind them. willed herself to ask: "...A job in Markarth?"

"She was to track down an escaped prisoner, one of the rare cases who scraped their way out of Cidhna Mine. Given the terrain and the added danger of the Forsworn, we could only afford to spare our most experienced sister."

"\_Saad\_? With no one to assist her?"

"Njada insisted on journeying alone, and she said she'd thrash any of us who tagged along after her."

Reksadonviing supposed that was meant to be interpreted as grimly amusing. But Vilkas didn't smile as he spoke, and his gaze was elsewhere, sideways and toward the western, mountain-edged skies.

She tilted her head, staring down at him from under an armored brow. "Aren't you worried?"

"Kodlak isn't, not enough to send any of us to investigate."

"Then you think he's placed too much faith in her?"

"The old man isn't to blame. He said his piece after I offered her the assignment, and that was that."

"I wasn't blaming anyone. So, what is - "

With an audible rasp of metal on metal, Vilkas folded his gauntlet-clad arms. "No."

"No, what?"

"I know what you're thinking. No, we won't send you to find her."

The gray dovah's quills twitched at the prospect. "Because, poor chances of success aside, she may as well soon attack me as listen?"

"Besides that, how could you think the Forsworn wouldn't bring you down first?"

Reksadonviing sighed through her nose, reminding herself to remain calm. "What I lack in brawn, I can compensate for in planning ahead. \_Tol pogaas Zu'u mindok\_. How many of their strongholds line the roads to and from Markarth?"

"Too many to count."

"And this... Njada, if she is as \_klovmul\_ as she sounds, she would not take those routes if it meant making an easy target of herself?"

"No."

"You've never seen Skyrim from the air, \_joor\_. The vantages of the tallest towers around pale in comparison. You don't know how valueable that advantage is when it comes to - "

"The risk is too - "

"Still, alone and outnumbered, there's always the possibility that - "

More than simple guilt had to weigh down on the werewolf's mind. For he relented in a snap and a glare, "\_Fine\_. I'll see Kodlak about it now. Wait here."

Struck dumb, Reksadonviing watched him stalk back down the Skyforge steps and disappear into the hall.

The nord truly was an enigma. How was it he was so quick to deny her assistance, to lecture her on the importance of knowing how to wait gracefully, and then turn around to consider proposing a search?

A flustered groan interrupted her musings before they could get underway.

"You two \_still\_ fighting?" Farkas asked, ignorant of the ensuing irony, as he stood poised with a parried sword braced against Ria's.

"...Maybe?"

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Notes:<strong> Warning. Insecure rants/points to follow.

- Chatty Vilkas is too chatty? Something besides the obvious had to be eating at him.

- Yes. What of Njada, the 'cast iron' stereotype?

- And yes, a lotta talking... again. Rating has officially gone up to T with the inclusion of profanity (in whatever language it may be).

- Nahfahlaar is a canon dovah, only referred to in text ingame. Being the bookworm he's implied to be, Vilkas probably would have scraped together as much reading information on dragons as he could in trying to find a way to approach/'train' Reksa.

- No real mention of Vignar and Brill. Yet. Their ingame roles seem largely dependent on the civil war questline, which has not yet factored into "Forge".

- As if they didn't already, spoilers abound with coming installments for this story (which, again, is definitely not a story which caters to those who have not played TESV).

And one last thing - while the premise I had in mind for "Forge" is

set as of now, in truth, I only had clear thoughts for how to structure the first act. That's not to say I'm in desperate need of a full-time beta, but to have one or two people to bounce ideas off of, point out inconsistencies and the like, before said entries are published would help keep the flow going.

For instance, this whole device of Rekse's easy-to-ignite temper, the moments she lets it get the better of her. I'm unsure if it makes her seem petty and flaky, or truly flawed. In doing that, I'm trying to keep Paarthurnax's words in play, to quote:

\_"What is better - to be born good, or to overcome your evil nature through great effort?"\_

I took that to infer that all dragons are of a certain aggressive disposition, some more so than others. Whether they were made that way or fell prey to the pitfalls of overstuffed egos, that's open to debate. Rekse can't exactly swap her fangs and claws out and go vegetarian, but she can do the best she can despite the fact. Does this make sense, or am I talking pure nonsense?

Dov terms/phrases:

><em>gjok nii <em>- fuck it  
><em>grohiik<em> - wolf  
><em>joor<em> - mortal  
><em>klovmul<em> - headstrong  
><em>kon<em> - girl  
><em>krosis<em> - sorrow/sorry  
><em>lig<em> - please  
><em>nid<em> - no  
><em>rok<em> - hey  
><em>saad<em> - real/really  
><em>tol las qurnen<em> - that is standard/normal  
><em>tol pogaas Zu'u mindok<em> - that much I know  
><em>zeymah<em> - brother

### 13. Proof

**\*\*Disclaimer:\*\*** Skyrim and all its canon content are the property of Bethesda Game Studios. No infringement is intended.

Reksadonviing and any unrecognizable names are characters of my own devising.

**\*\*Notes:\*\*** Fav/alert thanks to espadaforever, Qnedou, SpiritOfJazz and WhiteCat2011.

Short, rambling flashback chapter, as it has been a while since the last one. It's more meant to discredit one in-game book recently discovered by \_moi\_ than to move things along. I have already mentioned this is a AU story. Let's call it artistic license, shall we?

"There Be Dragons" by Thoralf Bjorik, be damned.

\* \* \*

><p><em>"<em>Fah laat tiid, nid! Rok yah wah gran niin, rok fen biis praz.\_" \_

\_Reksadonviing kept her quills folded and seethed quietly. No matter how many times he threw her to the valley's floor, Alduin's argument remained the same. This cloudless, sun-stoked morning, a few scant days since Keinlassraghot's show of comradarie, was proving no different. The grayscaled female had worked up enough energy and courage to approach the black dovah, as he had returned in one of his increasingly-rare visits to the creche.\_

\_As always, he had claimed the highest, most spacious cliff as his perch of splendor. It was the only roost to feature some weathered-down remnants of a Dovah Zaag ruin, extending down through the valley wall where the draugr still stirred. The drakes guarding the valley avoided their lord unless summoned. It was his place alone to preen and admire the sight of so many maiden dov in one place.\_

\_And once again, the grayscaled had alighted on it, unannounced, with her now-habitual request to rescue Odahviing.\_

\_"Please, milord. If you will spare no drakes, I'll venture to search for myself. He is your \_Ziist\_. "\_

\_Alduin tossed his head with a derisive snort, a scowl twisting his gnarled features. He sat comfortable with the wall at his back, wings arranged to either side with his chest thrust out. "Irrelevant past tense. That title has fallen to Krahsahjot." Slowly, as if a glance alone were an honor earned, he craned his neck to look at her. Whether he entertained these arguments in sincerity or simply to humor her, the lowest of the low, it was impossible to say. "As for you, my judgement remains the same: you are to remain with your creche sisters. If you do not, I will ensure your compliance, as I have so many times already."\_

\_Huddled low against the stone, Reksadonviing clenched her jaw. The healing furrows rended between the scales and spines along her back were impossible to forget.\_

\_Affronted by her silence, Alduin bristled, reading between the lines. "Don't feign innocent interest in the matter. Your connection to him is no secret to me, \_meyus kon\_. I commend your loyalty, as it seems to have given you actual purpose to act on. But that is as far as my praise extends. \_Rok lost kosaan gone fah keyal. \_You'd do well to forget it entirely, find yourself another suitor, or perish trying."\_

A lesser drake for a lesser female, he means.

\_Or did he?\_

\_Reksadonviing decided to spit it out. "You suspect treachery, milord?"\_

\_"\_Unstiid, joor sos. \_Particularly in cases of this magnitude. Our dearest Paarthurnax has reminded me all too clearly."\_

Meaning his apparent alliance with the Dovahkiin?

\_There was always chatter among the females. But as long as they wished to remain breathing the air of Tamriel, none of them dared to

speak of Alduin's defeat at the Throat of the World to his face. This was the first visit to the valley he had paid them since their drake guards had begun to speak of it. Only his presence curbed the rampant gossiping.\_

\_Reksadonviing carefully steered away from further mention of it. "Odahviing deserves no better?"\_

\_Alduin shook his head again. "As I said, he took it upon himself to answer the Dovahkiin's call. Foolish lout. He ought to have known better. If I could not best the Dovahkiin, what chance could he have \_\_\*\*possibly\*\*\_\_ had?"\_

\_Reksadonviing glanced up at him in awe, as if the idea had only dawned on her. "Milord, if he did not go to battle, do you think -"  
\_"

\_The World-Eater's wing lashed out, cuffing her across the muzzle with a thumbclaw. "Don't insult me by entertaining such petty fantasies, \_joor sos\_. 'Did he go to speak to them'? At first, no. But so many weeks of captivity have to have yielded something from him, that the Dovahkiin can use to their advantage. If Odahviing has turned, he made his choice, to live or die with, as Numinex before him did."\_

\_Squinting against the new ache ringing in her skull, Reksadonviing huddled lower and frowned as the name lodged itself in her mind. \_Numinex?

\_Alduin straightened out and rose to his feet, content to see her cowering in his shadow. "As for you, I advise you drop the matter altogether. Find yourself another weakling consort. Whether you fail or succeed in that endeavor, it matters not to me. You dare approach again, know it will be your last attempt to petition anything from me."\_

\_She kept her eyes averted as she crept away. The brisk breeze wafting by served as a tailwind to help her glide away from the perch, but she flapped to hasten her departure. Past experience told her there was nothing else to be learned from the black dovah, not without risking further injury. By comparison, a slap on the nose was the most minor punishment Alduin had dealt her.\_

\_Acknowledging it didn't make the knowledge Odahviing was still gone and at the mercy of the Jul any less easy to bear. Even if he had turned traitor (and she regarded the word in its loosest definition) just to hear his voice on the wind would be sign enough for her to rest easy, to know he was safe.\_

\_Alduin might have taken it as an excuse to finally end or exile her. What use could his ex-Second's lover be to his aims if she would not conform to their lord's ideals?\_

\_Perhaps the timing wasn't right. The World-Eater's shame of his defeat at the Monahven, though he would never admit to it, would keep his impulses in check. He couldn't afford to appear petty, taking his frustrations out on others. And if he behaved himself, refraining from petty bullying of the lesser ranks of the dov, so would the rest of the creche.\_

\_Ignoring how the force pulled on her mending muscles, Reksadonviing flapped with new vigor to reach her chosen shelf - not far from Keinlassrahgot's. The blue frost dragon was absent at the moment, but all the creche knew to respect her vacant perch as if it were Alduin's. Her standing was almost equal that of the newly-appointed second.\_

\_As she had so many times already, the grayscaled folded herself up behind the weak line of scraggy-looking pine trees that rimmed the shelf's edge, her only defense from the heckling of her creche sisters. She stared through the gaps of the broken branches, eyes absently tracking the occasional scaled form that flew by. Gradually, she let her ears tune out the roars and words of her kind that echoed up and down the valley.\_

\_Again, she turned to thinking to pass the time - \_

\_Only to uncoil herself with an instinctive snarl as she was abruptly interrupted by the sight of a drake soaring up into view from below, too close for comfort.\_

\_"\_Feymahl turn\_, \_goraan\_. It is only I."\_

\_The drake did not attempt to land. He only hovered before the ledge with steady, measured wingbeats. He stood on ceremony, as the jul would put it, refraining from alighting on a female's ledge to which he had not been invited.\_

\_Belatedly, she made note of the intruder's golden scales littered with scars and broken corners, and the small, stumpy dorsal spines. There was the high arch of his nose spur, the ugly, yellow fangs, and the piercing green eyes that weren't so different from hers.\_

\_A name finally supplied itself: Krahsahjot.\_

\_He was her elder and now-superior in rank, but Reksadonviing spared no kindness for her greeting, quills spread and teeth bared: "What do you want, \_zuwuth?"\_

\_The meaning behind his name wasn't aptly bestowed, so far as she knew. But the coolness with which he spoke told all about his personality: that of a diligent, level-minded dovah, not prone to making rash judgments. How else would he have held the longest reign of them all before the dovahriid had defeated him, too, in eras past?\_

\_"Merely to see for myself the thorn in our master's side," Krahsahjot remarked. He did not sneer, but he did glare with the same fervor most dov did favor her with. "We have not yet spoken."\_

\_"Is that all?" Reksadonviing demanded, without taking her eyes off the elder drake. Whatever his tone, he still embodied the authority that she had learned to be wary of, and learned to run from at the slightest hint of animus. She remained poised to jump aside, through the gap to her left where she knew the pine trees would not impede her. "What, pray tell, do you feel we must talk about?"\_

\_"Truthfully, not much. But I admit I have let simple curiosity get the better of me. This is my first visit to the rekindleds' valley.



Already the others speak strange stories about you."\_

"And you come to me hoping to dissect the rumors from fact? \_Nid. \_I am in no mood to honor your request."\_

"Without even hearing what it is? Are you not the sickeningly open-minded youth I was told you are?"\_

That stung. Did he mean to say he thought ill of her, like the rest?\_

Again, a sliver of backwards logic supplied the answer: no. Try as she might to deny it, even an unsavory reputation among the dov was better than no reputation at all. Whereas before they counted her as little better than nothing, a mishap of sinful parents and cursed blood, now she was known for \_something\_. \_

"So, speak quickly, then," she grumbled.\_

"Odahviing. Do you still harbor a desire to seek him out?"\_

Eyes narrowing, telltale smoke curled out of her nostrils and the corners of her mouth. "What of it if I do?"\_

Krahsahjot's voice, deep and rumbling, dropped to a whisper almost lost between the beats of his wings. "Then I'd advise you to exercise patience and wait, \_goraan\_. Your best chance to see him again is to take none at all. Change is in the making, whatever our master believes, whether he approves or not. There is proof."\_

The cryptic response, combined with its delivery from the mouth of Alduin's new second, overtook her anger like ocean water breaking on boiling lava.\_

"What do you mean? What proof?"\_

"\_Hi\_."\_

"Me?"\_

Krahsahjot said no more. With a lingering look that was part suspicion, part respect, he veered off and flew away.\_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Notes:<strong> Brought to you after two days of PC!Skyrim, and a day taken off of work due to family drama (suffice it to say life at home is not fun right now). /V-V\

In case one is confused on the timing, this bit of filler is meant to take place after "Alduin's Bane" and "The Fallen", but before "The World-Eater's Eyrie". Odahviing says, ingame, that after his defeat at the TotW, Alduin fled to Sovngarde. But who knows? He might have made a short return or two to Skyrim during the extent of Odahviing's imprisonment (which for the purposes of "Forge" lasted some time).

I know we're kinda jumping around with these flashback chapters and at what points in the timeline they occur. Nowhere in chapter three was Krahsahjot referred to, directly or in passing.

Bear with me. Odahviing also mentions in "The Fallen" there are several dov who had begun to question Alduin's claim to lordship among themselves, right? This short-lived exchange between Krah and Reksha can be counted as one such instance. Can it really be any surprise that the fresh, hand-picked second (still third in the chain of command, pending a confirmation of Odahviing's 'treason') would be one of them? Krahshahjot, being the old dovah he is, knows change when he smells it. And after seeing where it is Alduin's tactics \_haven't\_ got them, he might just be open to the idea of a change of pace, as Reksha can exemplify?

Again, to sum it all up with an ingame quote, this time by Storn of the Skall:

\_"Nothing that lives remains the same forever."\_

Like the Fragment/Rights gap, or comparing Kodlak to Paarthurnax (though no actual conversation between he and Reksha has yet been explored), chapters like this can exist to fill in the blank areas of previous installments. Anything that confused readers in this chapter is likely to be explained in the next one. And like Keinlassrahgot, introducing Krahshahjot leaves us with another plot thread to explore.

As does the mention of Numinex.

Dov terms/phrases:

><em>Dovah Zaag<em> - the Dragon Cult  
><em>dovahkriid<em> - dragonslayers  
><em>fah laat tiid, nid <em>- for the last time, no  
><em>feymahl turn, goraan <em>- settle down, youngling  
><em>hi<em> - you  
><em>Krahshahjot<em> - "Cold Phantom Maw"  
><em>meyus kon <em>- foolish girl  
><em>Monahven<em> - Throat of the World  
><em>nid<em> - no  
><em>rok lost kosaan gone fah keyal <em>- he has been gone for weeks  
  
><em>rok yah wah gran niin, rok fen biis praz <em>- he sought to  
battle them, he will pay the price  
><em>unstiid, joor sos <em>- always, mortal blood  
><em>ziist<em> - second  
><em>zuwuth<em> - elder

#### 14. Cozy

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Reksadonviing and any unrecognizable names are characters of my own devising.

**\*\*Notes:\*\*** Fav/alert thanks to Blade for Hire, dkj224, joarcv97, Lady Idryl, LegioXi, Lune the Twilight Fox, RakshaDaemon, Rasgnarok Kro Narok, SeekerM, Shadeslayer113, and videogamerfan144.

At last. \_This\_ is the long-awaited chapter that explains Reksadonviing, cut and dry, in the plainest terms I can manage. Without spoilers for what's to come.

Why did it take this long?

I dunno. First time my Dragonborn spoke to Paarthurnax, I hung out for forty-plus minutes listening to him talk. XD

But seriously, the second act is still largely aimless. Beyond this rescue mission, I have little planned.

\* \* \*

><p>Ria, sitting upon a boulder, pulled the cloak tighter around her shoulders with one hand, and prodded the blazing fire with a stick in the other. "And he didn't think turn you in?"<p>

Reksadonviing, lying curled in the dirt on the other side of the pit, paused again, thinking of how to phrase her next words in Tamrielic. She watched as a cloud of embers borne of the crackling logs burst into the chilled Reach air and rose to fizzle out against a gloomy night sky. The oncoming night would be cold and wet, by the smell of it.

"Hmm. There wasn't any point. By that time, we were all growing tired of Alduin's empty promises. Drakes kept dying all across Keiz-Skyrim, and he wasn't going to any lengths to change things so that further death might be avoided. I wasn't sure of Krahsahjot's intent at first, but trusting in his need to test the rumors for himself, I did as he advised. Nothing more was said, and once we heard Paarthurnax's summons and learned of Alduin's final defeat, his advice proved true."

"Then... what he meant to say was, 'wait, for your time would come'?"

The dovah sighed a deep sigh, chin resting on her folded arm. "Correct."

Explaining herself to Ria, day by day, had been a cleansing experience the grayscaled didn't think she was that in need of. Stimulating conversation, she had missed in the few weeks she spent lurking around in Whiterun's shadow. Again, like with Odahviing, once the grayscaled had the imperial's confidence, telling stories around the campfire with her, literally and not, was welcome therapy. It sated the young woman's desire to learn more about the Dov, and proved a convenient way to pass the time.

Especially now, after a week or two of calling Dragontooth Crater their 'home' away from home.

The place stunk, and more than in just the ironic sense.

"So... why did you leave?"

Faced with a question she already thought adequately answered, Reksadonviing's baffled face hiked up to stare over the campfire. "What do you mean?"

Ria glanced aside, indecisive. She seemed to grapple with elaborating. Or the pronunciation of names: "I mean... I know you said it was your want to get to know other races better. That's a

great cause. But you talk about these others, Odahviing, Keinlassrahgot and now Krahsahgot- er, sahjot. They showed you tolerance, why would you part from them?"

"Besides not knowing if they even wished to stay in Tamriel, let alone ask them to share in my endeavor?" Reksadonviing flexed her tailtip in lieu of a shrug. Not so long ago, the response would have been deadpanned in delivery. The imported sarcasm was now lacking. The more answers she gave, the less Ria seemed to doubt her. And in time, the dovah hoped that understanding would transmit to the other Companions. "Old habits, I suppose. If a female of my kind isn't sworn to a mate, we wander between territories until we do."

"Hm. You don't consider Odahviing worth swearing to?"

Reksadonviing glared impulsively before dispelling the look with a tired headshake, silently cursing her inborn nature yet again. The imperial meant no malice, after all. "\_Ni asht pah. \_It just wouldn't have worked. The Dovahkiin would have..."

She trailed off, suddenly uncertain. What \_would\_ the Dragonborn have done?

Ria's eyebrows rose. "From what you've told me, Odahviing is as much as a thinking dragon as you are, Reksha. Together, you could have reached an understanding, like you did before."

"And the Dovahkiin would allow it?" Reksadonviing exhaled through her nose, a hollow, unimpressed sound that echoed off the stonefaces around them to mingle with the drone of nighttime bugs. "Love is a fickle thing for our kind, \_kon\_. Very few bonds last more than a month's time who aren't blood relations of some kind. At the time, I took my affections for Odahviing as reason to continue pleading his case while he was held captive, but things are anything save simple for the dov now. Better that he pick one focus over another, and he chose service to the Dovahkiin over me."

"Still, it must have hurt to part ways like that. And to stay apart..."

Shifting her weight, Reksadonviing rolled to lie on her opposite hip and readjust herself for a better view of the road leading up into the secluded crater. She refolded her wings before her, wingskin-clad fingers furled at her sides, and rested her chin on her wrist again. "\_Wooq nii. \_It's enough to know he's still alive. For as long as my kind exist, there is the possibility for another reunion someday. I can only hope."

With that line of queries exhausted, Ria tossed the stick into the blaze and huddled deeper into her wool cloak. Her hair, freed from its usual braid, fell forward to frame her face, tensed as it was against the chill. While Reksha watched the road from around the crumbled tower at her back, the imperial watched her. "What was the final straw, then? What pushed you to actually leave them?"

"...Impatience, strangely enough. I got tired of ghosting around, trying to decipher double-meanings every day, afraid of being assailed verbally or otherwise by those who would disagree with me. Paarthurnax saw how I kept so close to myself after Odahviing left. I

have no doubts he wouldn't have permitted me this freedom if he didn't think it was in my best interests."

"Like Kodlak wouldn't have allowed us to travel here did he think there wasn't a chance of finding Njada."

"\_Geh ahrk niid\_. You and I have not done as much searching as... kept up appearances."

As if she were being reminded of an unsavory memory, Ria pulled the cloak around to fully shield herself. The Forsworn garb fit her figure. Unfortunately, her opinion of what it failed to cover was anything but a match. "For all the good it hasn't done. Vilkas and Farkas can take care of themselves, but I would've thought you searching from the air would help find her faster than playing security to our basecamp has."

Reksadonviing sighed again, this time in tolerable aggravation. "You know, as 'whelps', that that wasn't our call to make."

"I don't see either of them playing dress-up to fool anyone."

"Lugging that much armor over terrain like this is no easy task, for days on end."

Ria smirked, the firelight playing amiably with the yellow of her irises. "Huh. I'll be sure to mention your fair assessment to whichever one of them gets back first."

\_For what good it will do.\_ The gray dovah had her doubts. Ria, Aela, and Kodlak were only the relative minority of their guild who already placed some trust in her. The others were still circling the idea like the wary, battle-tested wolves they were.

"Hrm. You realize how odd I find it, that they would allow us to guard the camp together now, but you could not answer my summons to Riverwood without bringing Aela along?"

The bright look on Ria's face dimmed. She was the exact opposite of Vilkas, as easy to read as dovscript. But Reksadonviing supposed she was grateful for the open persona, one she could bounce questions off of without receiving an indignant glare with each response.

"It wasn't as though they \_made\_ me tell them, Reksa. I just... they noticed when I wasn't at Jorrvaskr. Any of us leaves Whiterun for more than a day, a little forewarning is always appreciated by the Circle."

"You're certain you weren't... unduely compelled to share with them your intent?"

"They aren't like that," Ria insisted. "No one asked me about the matter until I was ready to step out the door."

"Aela insisted?"

"Yes. She knows a test when she hears it. She insisted on coming along, to be part of the act."

Finding the road empty for the moment, Reksadonviing glanced back at the imperial. "\_Hi seik\_, to defend you if talks turned sour?"

Ria shrugged, hands still holding the cloak in place. "It's a valid point. We're only out here because Njada insisted otherwise."

"And for how much longer?" The dovah gritted her teeth for voicing such a whiney statement, decided the damage was done, and followed through. "For all we know, she has already made it back to Whiterun."

Ria shook her head. The prospect of a few weeks camping and scouring the Reach would have galled most. But therein the loyalty among the Companions made up for a lot. "There would have been word waiting in Markarth. Vilkas will tell us one way or another when he returns with those supplies."

"While his brother searches alone?"

"Farkas knows how to handle himself."

The logs in the firepit crackled and collapsed on themselves. Reksadonviing's tailtip flicked again, betraying her stillness, how her mind remained at work. This whole concept of Shield-Siblings had to allow for some compromise, she supposed. It had been her task to guard the crater, and Ria's to guard the camp set up in the one delapidated stone tower that still stood. Her Forsworn disguise was more for looks, along with the blood-soaked totem stakes that had been erected at the road's end. All of it was aimed to fool any would-be travellers that happened upon them that it be best they continue on their way.

Meanwhile, the twins did most of the work of actually looking for Njada.

"How long have you been with the Companions, kon?"

Ria's brow furrowed at the question, unceremoniously blurted out as it was. "Why do you ask?" At the dovah's silent, prompting look, she relented, "A few months before you turned up."

"\_Zu'u koraav. \_Had that always been your intent, to one day join them?"

Her fingers kneaded restlessly against the hem of the cloak. "Ever since I can remember being told the stories. Ma and Pa thought it strange, that I'd want to leave the comforts of Cyrodiil. It's where our family has been for three generations, if not more. But I just didn't see anything for myself there."

"\_Nii pah wahl honah,\_" Reksadonviing couldn't help the slight smile that tugged on the corners of her mouth. There was the simplest reason the young woman had latched onto her so quickly, besides a joor's inherent fascination with the dov. "We're not so different, then."

"The dragons have their stories about mortals, too, I imagine?"

"Just as twisted and steeped in prejudice as they are the other way

around," Reksadonviing countered, sensing how the tables were turned, and who was doing the fishing now. "I've tried to put them out of my mind."

"But none about the Companions?"

The grayscaled shook her head. "\_Nid nostig\_", but very little Dov literature is written in full form, let alone any about the guilds of Man and Mer. My own impression stems from a mix of nest memories, latent encounters, and word-of-mouth."

Ria glanced around, ever vigilant of their surroundings. The night around them was only getting darker, and her eyesight was not so adept as the dovah's.

Reksadonviing could sense the encroaching unease, especially in this muggy air, how one's scent became a little more acrid when spiked with adrenaline. She spoke again to take the imperial's mind off it: "\_Saag\_", have I told you exactly why it is the other \_dovahhe\_ think so poorly of me?"

"You mean, besides what I already know, there's more?"

Her surprise sounded genuine, enough so that Reksadonviing thought with even more conviction Ria was the one she could disclose this to, whom could appreciate its meaning. "A being as old as I has as many secrets to share as I've forgotten. Most Dov would sooner die than stoop so low, to disclose their pasts to mere \_jooree\_, or trade their intimate knowledge for trust."

"Unless said Dov found someone they thought worthy of knowing?"

"\_Kon\_, I have already told you far more than even Jarl Balgruuf. That alone makes me think you ought to know all of the reasons behind my estrangement."

"I wasn't saying you couldn't tell me," Ria remarked, her tone strange, caught somewhere between belittling and supportive. "But are you sure you ought to?"

"...\_Krosis\_?"

"I mean, I don't want you to spill your soul to me if you think that's the only way to get in one's good graces. We all have matters we'd rather keep private. And you need not create more of a rift between yourself and the other dragons than what already exists. There are other merits to pride yourself on, that will endear you to your comrades."

"Such as?"

"Well... a little small talk now and then. Don't get me wrong - the conversations we've had have been pretty extraordinary. But it wouldn't go over with more common folk very well. And if your goal is to eventually live among people like us, you'll have to learn how to identify with those of less formal cloth."

"Hrm. A fair point. I suppose it wouldn't be becoming of me to share knowledge exclusively with you without affording the same to the

Circle."

"Right. Better we don't know, unless absolutely necessary. Who knows if someday you might regret being so open about your past?"

Reksadonviing smiled a slight smile again. "You're wiser than you let on."

"Sometimes. I try not to overplay it."

"Like the restoration spells. The others don't strike me as devout supporters of magic."

"They come in handy every so often, though."

Night finally rolled in, and along with it, the first sheets of cold, drizzling rain started to fall. With the firepit extinguished, Ria retreated inside the tower.

Reksadonviing perched herself atop it like an inexplicably-placed gargoyle. Whatever battlement had originally been in place was in serious disrepair. The floor it once stood on was rotted and missing planks in numerous places. Turning circles atop the narrow structure, the grayscaled flared her wings to make a cover of herself, to keep the rainwater out. It was an imperfect arrangement, but better than nothing.

The night and its rain would keep them defended from discovery for a time. The dovah was able to look down the one existing 'staircase' and watch as Ria busied herself with what chores she could. The imperial switched her Forsworn garb for her leather-based armor, re-braid her hair, wrapping the cloak around herself once more. She took inventory of her supplies, along with adding to her small stash of alchemic ingredients what she had found in the last day.

Ria was still digging through her knapsack when one, then two familiar faces trudged up the road and into the meager torchlight of the tower's interior.

Reksadonviing quirked her head like a startled deer, quills scraping stone, before reminding herself there was no danger.

"\_Valokein rigir, zeymah\_."

Wringing water from his hair, Farkas offered a sideways glare by way of a greeting. He shrugged off the pack of provisions slung over one shoulder and wordlessly accepted the flask and rations handed his way.

Vilkas didn't stand on ceremony, or waste any time on pleasantries. He prepared the party's bedrolls in silence before taking his place by the gaping doorway, intent on standing watch.

"Get your sleep, whelps. We leave early tomorrow."

"Where to?"

"Lost Valley Redoubt."



Ria must have known better than to ask any more. She settled down to sleep, curled up on her side, expression hidden by her shoulder.

Farkas didn't bother shedding his armor to rest. He fidgeted only a moment before heaving a contented sigh, and was still.

In contrast, Reksadonviing was curious to know what breakthrough had been made. She had not heard Vilkas sound so sure of an order since they had parted ways outside Whiterun. It had been her who had flown ahead with the idea to claim Dragontooth Crater as a base. Finding no opposition, she waited in clear weather to meet up with the three after their two-day hike. From there, it had been the master-at-arms' itinerary to continue to Markarth. He had 'suggested' that the dovah and the imperial stay behind to guard the camp.

Without offering details, Farkas had loyally followed his twin's lead.

Left to their own devices, the camp had been arguably the most boring post to maintain. Over the next several days, Vilkas and Farkas made use of what scant evidence there was to scour the countryside. Innkeepers and guards in Markarth confirmed that Njada Stonearm had paid the city a visit, only to leave after completing her own search for the convict. Questioning of locals along the road had only yielded so much more of what had become of her since. There was the fact she had stopped briefly at the Old Hadron Inn, but she hadn't said much besides demand a room, and left within the same night.

From what the Companions told her, Reksadonviing thought Njada sounded as approachable as a heckled sabre cat. Her reputation was, anyone itching for a fight or cursed with the inane thought to rob from her would get more than they bargained for. But were she outnumbered, overwhelmed, it stood to reason why bandits or the Forsworn would take prisoner one of the fighters guild's seasoned warriors. It would give them something to leverage.

But no demands had yet been made.

Which meant finding her somewhere in the ever-cantankerous Reach would be as trying a job as any.

Kodlak's argument: Why not bring the dovah along?

Reksadonviing remembered witnessing the curt exchange in Jorrvaskr's training yard. The twins had glared at her then, too. In short, they hardly be blamed for seeming cross and frustrated by now. If Vilkas had any hope Njada was to be found in that aforementioned stronghold, he wouldn't make the call to travel there, and bring their newest asset along, lightly.

In the meantime, he certainly wasn't saying more about it.

"Do you mind, dragon? You're soaking the stairs."

It seemed a petty request, but Reksadonviing feigned a puzzled glance beneath herself. The water dripping from her neck and face was splattering all over the wooden steps. Awkwardly, she withdrew, folding her head back under her extended wing like a roosting duck.

Like this, she waited out the storm and the indistinguishable night it hid.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Notes:<strong> More talking, I know. And the ending was kinda rushed. But it was a good time to show just how comfortable Rekse and Ria have grown around each other. And hopefully this will lead into a not-disappointing action chapter to come next.  
:3

A bit of reiteration: I know I'm not going to great lengths to explain settings very much. But again, this is a story which relies heavily on the reader's knowledge of Skyrim's many locations.

If you haven't played, do so. I'm not a rabid RPG fan, but roaming the expansive world and degree of individualization one can achieve makes it a fun title to explore.

Dov terms/phrases:

><em>dovahhe<em> - dragons (plural, irreverant use in lieu of Dov)

><em>hi seik <em>- you mean

><em>jooree<em> - mortals

><em>kon<em> - girl

><em>krosis<em> - sorry

><em>ni asht pah <em>- not at all

><em>nid nostig <em>- no offense

><em>saag<em> - say

><em>sos<em> - blood

><em>valokein rigir <em>- welcome back

><em>woog nii <em>- nevermind it

><em>zeymah<em> - brother (also can be interpreted as plural)

## 15. Speak

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**\*\*Notes:\*\*** Fav/alert thanks to Rachaelmc.

I am not an action writer. \*facepalm\* Apologies in advance.

\* \* \*

><p>The morning had warmed quickly. Fallen rainwater and the slower-flowing rivers of the Reach conspired with the sun's heat to birth great banks of thick fog. It was as though the clouds themselves had been pulled down to the ground, cutting visibility down enough to render them all blind. From atop the tower at Dragontooth Crater, the grayscaled had taken one dismayed look at the haze before a solution popped into her mind, almost as an afterthought.<p>

"\_Lok\_!"

The fog parted long enough for her to glance the blue skies above. She did not wait for the twins or Ria to point out the curtailed useage of the shout. With orders to assail Lost Valley Redoubt to spur her on, she launched herself into the air.

By foot, her destination was at least half a day's travel from the camp. By flight, she reached it within an hour of takeoff.

She recognized the ruin and its location more from memory than visual means, half-crumbled into the sloping mountainside, the waterfall which fed the Karth River crashing noisily down its western side. It was the same stronghold she had flown over several times while scouring for prey between the Reach and Falkreath. She had seen the animal-skin tents and smelled the fetid totems that stood along the staircases and stone.

Reksadonviing thought to minimize her wingbeats, make an ambush of her approach, but gliding in circles here without announcing herself would prove difficult. Beyond the river, the air was heavy and without a breeze.

Nervousness bit at her insides. Petty bandits were one thing. Annoited Forsworn were another. The way the Companions spoke of them, she would be smart to not charge headlong into their midst.

The first rounds of arrows that glanced off of her were not so deadly as they were a nuisance, like strange, upward-flying hail. The dual-pointed heads did not fit in the vulnerable gaps between her scaly armor. The archers were of sure aim, and found their targets along her jaw and chest, but these bothersome taps only further enraged the swooping dovah. The shafts that pierced and lodged themselves her wingfolds were the worst she suffered.

Eventually, she gave into the building bloodlust she so tried to avoid, to not let it cloud her thinking, and roared in frustration. She couldn't see her targets. Volley after volley of fire and ice smashed harmlessly into the stones. With each pass, she heard the Forsworns' cries of battle-fed elation, as they stepped out of cover to launch arrows and magic.

Vilkas neglected saying precisely how long the dovah was supposed to keep the Forsworn busy. But in flying to Lost Valley, Reksadonviing had come around to the idea that he wouldn't be too critical if one or two of their adversaries were dispatched entirely.

So long as she didn't get Njada killed, he would forgive her creative thinking, right?

In addition to the arrows, bolts of lighting and fire arced from between the stones and out of the fog. Their energy stung more than hurt, the magicka behind them half-absorbed by her hide. Reksadonviing couldn't remember the last time her lungs had hurled so much retaliatory flame. Shouts which came naturally to most dovahhe took their toll on her relatively-meager endurance.

There was only one place on the cliffs she could land and stage an effective ground fight while she still had her strength to call on.

So she did.

"You are no match for the Forsworn, dragon!"

They rushed her in one wave, swarming around her like rabid skeevers. She had to practically spin in place to keep track of each one. Head down, Reksadonviing winced at the crash of a spike-bladed sword on her brow. Snarling, she lashed out with an arm, unfurling her arrowed wing to swat three attackers aside.

"\_Ful saag hi, joor\_!"

She swung her head back in the opposite direction, to dig her spurred nose into the exposed gut of the man charging in from behind, warhammer raised in both hands. Warmth spilled over her face as she felt skin break, muscles tore, and soft innards were pulled open. His defiant cry turned to one of fear and agony as she knocked him to the ground, iron blade falling uselessly beside him. Without pausing to revel in her advantage, she seized both of his kicking legs in one crushing bite and wrenched her neck around again.

His limp, broken frame bounced once across the stone before disappearing over the cliff's edge.

To their credit, his fellows kept up their attack. Licks of fire singed and dried the blood on her face to a blackened crisp. Drawing another breath, Reksadonviing met their magic with as mighty a gout of fire as she could manage. She saw the white, shimmering glimpses of wards deflecting her fire, but also saw the feathers of headdresses burn away under her assault. Along the skin of their unwary wearers.

One wily, dagger-wielding Forsworn woman ducked around the dovah's defenses. She spun to avoid Reksadonviing's gnashing teeth, twisting her way into the vulnerable gap between neck and shoulder. Reksadonviing backpeddled, half-stumbling into the pool of water at their backs, but not before feeling the hot, stinging pierce of a blade being driven deep into the base of her neck

The second dagger, she spotted swinging back toward her levelled eye almost too late.

Improvising, she ducked, felt it glance uselessly off her ridged cheek, and rolled over her own wing. She felt her dorsal spines dig into the dirt and scratch against rock and - more specifically - the spikes of her shoulder driven into the face and torso of her knocked-over adversary. Righting herself with a splash, she threw her wing open again to dislodge the half-crushed body from her back.

She braced her thumbclaws on the pool's edge and shouted again:

"\_Yol Toor Shul\_!"

More cries met her ears. She smelled burning skin. Arrows flew through the launched blaze, pinging off her face and shoulders. Reksadonviing spluttered, taken aback, as one buried itself in the exposed, fleshy corner of her mouth. The shaft broke between her closing fangs, smoke curling into her vision.

Through the parting flames, more arrows lanced toward her. Besides

the fallen bodies, the grayscaled counted six more Forsworn that were still standing.

With a fierceness she hadn't thought herself capable of, she felt a new surge of energy well up in her chest. Quills flared, she surged forward from the pool. "\_Dreh hin volzaan\_!"

Their tenacity was a welcome challenge, so different from the kind she had subjected herself as of late, yet to a creature built for violence, it felt so perversely welcome and familiar. If she could survive the likes of a tempermental Alduin, these people were nothing.

She bit, clawed, and burned her way to victory. Rational thought fell by the wayside. With a disconnected sense of calm, she let her instincts take control. Blood splattered her scales and the ground around as they fought. She found guilty glee in beholding the horrified expressions of the Forsworn, watching the light of life disappear from their paint-framed eyes.

The dovah only came back to her senses when the last body, minus its head, fell and was still. Panting, salivating with some vile mixture of plasma and bile, she wheeled around to search for any lingering threats, sniffing despite her clogged nostrils. She used her teeth to rip through the tents, knocking crates aside with her wings. She prowled away from the pool, ripping down bonechimes as she went about her search.

Snaking around to root through the last standing tent, Reksadonviing belatedly remembered what - \_who\_ she was supposed to be looking for.

A woman. Her garb, a torn, roughspun tunic barely long enough to cover her body, was not that of a Forsworn. Her face was dirtied, but lacked warpaint. Besides bloodied and bruised, she seemed none the worse for wear.

Slack-jawed, Reksadonviing blinked, as if her sentient self needed a moment to reassert itself, and shook her head as she remembered a name.

"Njada Ston- \_rok\_!"

The sword lashed across her sullied muzzle, scraping scales and doing no real damage. But Reksadonviing still flinched and withdrew. Back to her senses meant a return to civility.

"Back off, dragon! You won't take me so easily!"

Standing sideways to the tent, defensive, wings furled and tail curled, Reksadonviing paused to regard the nord with narrowed eyes. She had no doubt as to how she must have looked, covered in half-dried trails and splatters of red, smelling of smoke, littered with bits of torn fabric and entrails. Talking herself innocent was pointless at that moment, so she settled for a low growl and simply sat on her haunches.

Njada Stonearm didn't appear placated. With a sword in one hand and one eye on her 'visitor', she hastily rooted through the tent. Reksadonviing spotted cut bands of cord on the ground next to a

bedroll, surmising that the woman must have somehow freed herself in the ensuing confusion.

But that was all that was clear to the dovah, besides the fact that Vilkas' information proved solid. Here was the missing member of the Companions.

Alive, yes.

Well, that was up for discussion.

Whatever she had been looking for, Njada finally gave up her search with a venomous "just \_great\_" before throwing an irate look over her shoulder.

"Well, then? What are you waiting for, dragon?"

Reksadonviing blinked and cocked her head sideways in lieu of a reply.

Rather than appear confused, Njada's face only contorted with more irritation. She stalked forward, out of the tent and into the mid-morning sun. "C'mon. You missed one."

"If by one, you mean yourself?" Reksadonviing shook her head, ignoring the warm pulse of blood welling around the embedded dagger in her collar. "You're the object of a rescue, Njada Stonearm. Isn't the fact I know your name proof of that?"

"Rescue, by a dragon?" Sword arm still branished, Njada laughed a high, disbelieving laugh which - in a less courageous individual - might had sounded hysterical. "I'd hardly think so."

"By order of the \_Zeymahzin\_ - your Companions."

The Nord's expression did not relax, but her eyes lost some of their glare. Her swordarm lowered by a visible inch.

Reksadonviing quirked an eyelid, half-opening a wing to gesture to herself. "Satisfied?"

"Far from it." Grappling with her thoughts, emotions or some combination of the two, Njada straightened her stance with a new glare. "\_Who\_ among them authorized this?"

"The Harbinger, Kodlak Whitemane," the dovah deadpanned. "At \_my\_ suggestion to your Master-at-Arms."

The swordarm lowered even further. "Now I'm just tempted to ask how this deal was even struck."

"\_Lig\_, can it wait?" Reksadonviing shrugged as if the congealing matter on her scales was becoming bothersome. The arrow shafts stuck in her wings clattered against themselves. "It's a long story. Give me a moment to wash this offal away, then we may converse."

Torn between instincts, Njada looked indecisive.

Reksadonviing huffed, feigning offense, re-reading what she had been told of the sabre cat. She stepped closer. "You run, and I'll just

follow you."

The swordpoint came up to settle warningly on the tip of her snout. Her free hand fisted, Njada's dark eyes hardened again.

"I'd never run from a dragon."

"\_Vrah\_. Least of all a kindly one. What kind of warrior would you be if you did?"

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Notes:<strong> Yeah. Action - not my forte. Which is why this chapter didn't last too long (besides the fact I will have little time to write at all in the coming week).

Up until this point, I've only inferred or shown off Rekse's fighting skills in passing. But given what weaponry the Forsworn favor, and their overall lack of armor, any dragon could probably hold their own against a number of them.

In case there's any confusion, this debacle was meant to take place at the pool at the foot of Bard's Leap Summit.

Dov terms/phrases:

><em>Dreh hin volzaan <em>- do your worst  
><em>Ful saag hi, joor <em>- so says you, mortal  
><em>lig<em> - please  
><em>rok<em> - hey  
><em>Yol Toor Shul <em>- Fire Breath shout  
><em>vrah<em> - indeed  
><em>Zeymahzin<em> - Companions

## 16. Impress

**\*\*Disclaimer:\*\*** Skyrim and all its canon content are the property of Bethesda Game Studios. No infringement is intended.

Reksadonviing and any unrecognizable names are characters of my own devising.

**\*\*Notes:\*\*** Fav/alert thanks to DevineWhisper16, RegalMisfortune, russub19, and Sevvyn.

"Christmas in July" - takes on a whole different meaning when one is a cashier at Walmart.

Anywho, enjoy what I managed to write during those seven days in a row of work.

\* \* \*

><p>Unlike the iron dagger of before, the elven dagger came loose not long after being thrust into her neck. Granted, Ria had some trouble being persuaded to work the blade free without causing further pain to her patient. She seemed reluctant to employ the barbaric fix. After watching her make a few hesitant tries, Farkas sighed, stepped in and gently pushed the imperial aside.<p>

Reksadonviing flinched and bit back a curse as the dagger came free.

Farkas turned the blood-soaked blade over in his hand before raising an eyebrow at her. "This isn't gonna become a routine thing with you, is it?"

The grayscaled glanced down as Ria held a wad of wrapped padding to the wound, pressing gently. "Hopefully not, \_zeymah\_. \_Nox\_- thank you."

All told, Reksadonviing and Njada had not done much talking. After a brief dip in the pool to cleanse herself, the dovah had stood by, watching the nord rummage around for supplies for much of midday. It was only later in the afternoon, when the rest of the rescue party crossed the river below and climbed the steps, that Njada demanded information from more familiar faces.

After her savage display, Reksadonviing wasn't sure she could blame her. With her keen ears, the dovah overheard all of what hadn't been said to her face.

Which, in hindsight, was nothing she hadn't heard already.

"You're kidding, right? This dragon, an \_honorary\_ Companion?" Njada had Vilkas by the shoulders, staring at him with abject disbelief. "Tell me you're kidding."

His tone remained as level as ever. "On the contrary, it was me who called the idea into play. Foolishly so."

Eyes lighting with realization, Njada stepped around him to stalk toward Ria. Her proximity to the dovah hadn't been lost on the scarfaced woman. "But you, whelp, it was \_you\_ \_who\_ thought this was a good idea?" She didn't get close. Just as abruptly, Vilkas reached out to grab her arm, which she yanked away with a growl. "What?"

"Drop the theatrics, Stonearm. You have more to answer for than her at this point. What happened?"

Her defiant glare held up for all of three seconds when pitted against such a cold, unforgiving stare. "Forsworn ambush. What more do you need to know?"

"You were here this whole time?"

"I couldn't say. After that skirmish, I was knocked out. They kept me blindfolded for a long time afterward, had me march some distances. Could've walked me all over the Reach for all I know."

"Like they didn't know what to do with you?" Farkas toed one of the charred bodies that still littered the ground. "Typical Forsworn."

"They put up some resistance, regardless," Reksadonviing commented. "\_Mey\_. As though they intended to hold onto their hostage."

"It was less a battle and more a slaughter," Njada groused, hands propped on her hips.



Vilkas glanced dubiously at the half-dismantled tent that still stood facing the pool beneath Bard's Leap Summit. It and the campfire they now gathered around were the only signs of Forsworn encampment still left standing. What grass managed to grow in the shallow soil around was now colored with a mixture of burnt black and blood. "Was it? How much did you see?"

"Enough to make me think you've all taken leave of your senses, letting this animal think herself part of our order."

Eyes narrowing, Reksadonviing felt a ripple of anger and indignation. The lack of gratitude, she could stomach, and the argument contradicting her involvement with Jorrvaskr's warriors was to be expected. But hearing the words still managed to tick all the unpleasant Dov impulses she now fought to keep suppressed.

The lingering taste of copper in her mouth didn't help.

"Nothing is final, Njada," Ria spoke up. "She hasn't had her Trial."

"Nor should it," the more-seasoned warrior spat. "The idea is laughable, and a disgrace. How many of our ancestors once suffered at the whims of creatures like this?"

"None who didn't rise to battle them during the \_Keinsejooree\_," Reksadonviing intoned, levelly but through tight fangs. "If present company is any indication."

"Flattery won't get you anywhere, dragon."

"You'd rather I hold to my kind's ways, then \_kahmaariik\_? Behave as a simple animal?" The grayscaled's quills flared. Ria, still standing beside her patient's neck, flinched and sidestepped to avoid being scratched. "You wouldn't last beyond the second blow."

"Enough of that, whelp."

Reksadonviing let the building snarl on her lips drop, quills folding back along her cheeks. Vilkas' simple command was a welcome rebuke to heed. Whether he intended it as such, none could say.

Njada didn't seem impressed. The scornful look did not vanish, and her nose remained thrust into the air. "Semi-trained at best," she quipped. "Kodlak agrees with this arrangement?"

"It was collectively discussed while you were busy being overpowered, or waiting for rescue. Would you rather have had been left to save yourself?"

"They kept a guard posted to watch for any attempts. All I needed was a distraction to free myself."

"\_Hi los valokein\_."

Ria's hand found the dovah's scratch-littered muzzle. Said dovah glanced sideways to see the imperial's chiding expression. "Reksa, please."

Njada made a rolling motion with her eyes, a gesture many exasperated mortals seemed to favor. "It has a name, too?"

"It's been a trying day for all of us," Vilkas surmised, continuing to remain neutral. "Shall we return to Whiterun? There will be plenty of time to talk of this later."

"Is the dragon to be our mule?"

"Should we not make camp elsewhere, then, get underway tomorrow morning?" Ria suggested. She looked uneasily to Farkas, who continued to wander about the plateau, inspecting the rendered bodies for loot. "Just because one band of Forsworn are gone doesn't mean more won't turn up here."

"A sound point." Vilkas glanced at the columns of stone above their heads. The ever-present roar of the waterfall could easily mask the approach of an ambush, even in broad daylight. "If any fled this assault, it would be to notify reinforcements."

"Camp if you will, \_jooree\_. I would accompany you back."

"On foot?" Njada snorted with a repressed laugh. "This gets better and better."

Reksadonviing flicked her tailtip, but said nothing.

"We'll need some more provisions, with another mouth around," Farkas remarked, without deference as to which 'mouth' he was speaking of. Skeptically, he regarded the blackened remains of the cooking meal which had been left on the campfire's roasting spit. "Who knows what's safe to take from here?"

Sensing the turn in conversation was final, Njada shrugged and strode back to the table beside the tent, where her confiscated weapons and armor still lay. "Let me do it, then. Killing something sounds good right about now."

\_No doubt\_. Still sitting on her haunches, Reksadonviing kept her mouth shut. Her thirst for conflict was sated, alliviating the need to channel the same violent impulses unto a verbal argument. Njada's personality was the most challenging one she had beheld in some weeks, and put Athis' biased doubts to shame. Vaguely, the grayscaled wondered if the woman's reception to her rescue would have been the same for the twins and Ria, were a dovah not part of the equation.

She rested idly while the others busied themselves around the camp, talking amongst themselves and examining supplies.

Ria, as always, stood close by. The dovah's new dagger wound had ceased to bleed. So the imperial mutely turned her attention to brushing the smears of red off of her friend's plate-sized scales.

Reksadonviing listened to the rasp of cloth for as long as she could stand it, while her green eyes watched the rest of their group move through the decimated camp, scavenging. Finally, the need to ask a new question became too much.

For Ria.

"Remind you of anyone?"

Taken aback, Reksadonviing closed her mouth with an audible click, glancing back over her ridged cheek. "\_Krosis\_"

"Njada. If I didn't know better, she's not unlike your Keinlassrahgots."

"...True. If she's capable of making the same turn of acceptance, I suppose we'll get along fine."

"Take heed, I don't think she'll come around to that idea overnight," Ria warned. "There's no proof, but somehow I think she's more touchy on the subject of dragons than any of us."

\_How? \_Reksadonviing frowned, deftly thinking of a more elaborate query. "Why not tell me this sooner?"

"It wouldn't have mattered. I thought you ought to see for yourself. Earning her confidence will probably be one of your biggest challenges."

"\_Lokaalus\_." The dovah's quills fluttered. While a part of her welcomed the thought, reasoning told her it would not be as easy a battle to win as the Forsworn had posed. "What makes you say that?"

"Intuition, mostly. Njada's the headstrong type, always about proving herself. While the Companions aren't in the business of dragonslaying yet, were the day to arrive - "

"That's enough." Reksadonviing drew back, carefully stepping around and away from Ria. She had heard what she needed to know. The implications were clear enough. Even if Athis had been knocked down to second-most-suspicious, nothing about the dark elf said he intended to follow through on his animosity. Njada's attitude posed more of a threat, that besides argue against the dovah to her fellows, she would literally fight the idea at the first opportunity.

For those Companions who sought fame, what greater glory was there than to slay a dovah?

\_She's no Dovahkiin. Still, thank Akatosh there is only \_one \_of her.\_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Notes:<strong> Another short chapter - because I'm still not positive if the next chapter will be present or past tense. I may have a vague inkling as to where to take the rest of this story.

Ingame, like the other junior Companions, Njada doesn't give you much to draw from besides her hostile attitude toward the Dovahkiin. I'm doing my best with how she might handle the thought of a dragon comrade, or not.

But no promises I won't mess up along the way. Story needs some animosity. So Njada can provide that for now.

Dov terms/phrases:

><em>hi los valokein <em>- you're welcome

><em>jooree<em> - mortals

><em>Keinsejooree<em> - War of the Mortals / Dragon War (kudos to Pocok5 for the correction)

><em>kahmaariik<em> - braggart

><em>krosis<em> - sorry (one of my favorite Dov words, I admit :P)

><em>lokaalus<em> - lovely

><em>mey<em> - fools

><em>zeymah<em> - brother

End  
file.